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MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD

MAULANA  
ABUL KALAM AZAD

The President of the  
Indian National  
Congress

A Biographical Memoir  
by  
Mahadev Desai

Foreword by  
Mahatma Gandhi

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WOKING

## FOREWORD

I have had the privilege of being associated with Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in national work since 1920. In the knowledge of Islam he is surpassed by no one. He is a profound Arabic scholar. His nationalism is as robust as his faith in Islam. That he is to-day the supreme head of the Indian National Congress has deep meaning which should not be lost sight of by every student of Indian politics.

M. K. GANDHI

SEVAGRAM, WARDHA

*May 18, 1940*



## PREFACE

This book deserves to be widely read in England to-day. Whenever Indian affairs are brought to the attention of the public (and we hear far less about India than its importance in the world warrants), we are given the picture of ninety million Muslims confronting over two hundred million Hindus in a seemingly irreconcilable quarrel. The reader of this book will discover how false that picture is. Not that Mr. Desai minimizes the Hindu-Muslim conflict. But he shows how the present President of the Indian National Congress, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, himself a devout and ardent Muslim, and many of his colleagues, both Mussulman and Hindu, have laboured for years, and are still labouring, to heal the breach. He shows how the Congress itself, far from demanding that the will of the majority shall prevail at all points (as many in this country seem to believe), has constantly and persistently proposed safeguards within the democratic structure of a free India for the full protection of the religious minorities. The reader of these pages will also realize how hard it is for Indians to resist the conclusion, so long as important British spokesmen persist in emphasizing and mis-



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representing the Congress attitude to it, that, whether deliberately or subconsciously, Britain's Indian policy is based on the principle "divide and rule."

At the moment when this preface is being written, our Government has, alas, drifted once again into open conflict with Indian nationalism, and many of India's noblest sons and daughters are in jail. Let us hope that in the near future a way of understanding will be found. The first step towards such an understanding will have been taken when the British Government recognizes that the rights of Indian minorities do not depend on British intervention, but that the majority party, under the leadership of men like Gandhi, Nehru, and Kalam Azad, can be trusted, in spite of the impetuosity of some of its less responsible members, to live up to its word in these matters.

A careful reading of this book should do much to emancipate English readers from current misconceptions. If we act justly towards India, the cause of justice is more likely to prosper also in Europe and the world.

The author is the secretary and close associate of Mahatma Gandhi, and the editor of the weekly paper *Harijan*.

HORACE G. ALEXANDER

*December 1940*

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## INTRODUCTION

When Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was elected as President of the Ramgarh Congress in March 1940 by 1,854 votes as against only 183 recorded for his opponent, there was no surprise expressed nor were any surmises made by the Indian Press. With them it was a foregone conclusion. In the British Press, however, all kinds of conjectures were made and conclusions drawn. The election, it was said, was intended to demonstrate that Congress stands for Muslims and that Muslims stand by the Congress. It was also suggested that it was a sop to those whose sympathies were for the Muslim League, but which might yet be won for the Congress. It was no such thing, however. The Hindu-Muslim tension which is alleged to be worse to-day than ever before had nothing to do with the election. His name was on every lip in 1938, and if he had not withdrawn his name at the eleventh hour he would have been elected President of the Tripuri Congress in 1939 by an overwhelming majority if not unanimously.

The election of a Muslim President is nothing new in the annals of the Congress. In pre-Gandhian days there had been Muslim Congress Presidents as there had

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been Christian and Parsi Presidents, and during the Gandhian era, i.e. during the past twenty years, there have been no less than four Muslim Presidents, one of them being the Maulana himself, who was chosen to be the President in 1923 at the early age of thirty-five. If therefore his election as President for the current year means anything, it means only that the Congress repudiates more strongly than ever before the communal outlook and is prepared to entrust the country's destiny to any Indian who has deserved to be the First Servant of the Nation.

If the West does not know the Maulana, India certainly knows her First Servant who had earned his Presidentship of the Congress as early as 1923. For he had distinguished himself as a rebel even before Gandhiji. In 1916, when the World War was going on, Gandhiji was a co-operator and proclaimed and preached loyalty to British rule. But the Maulana had even then proclaimed himself a rebel and was interned by the Government of India. It is a fact of signal significance that at the helm of the Congress which has refused Britain her co-operation in the war in which she is engaged, unless she sheds her Imperialism and recognizes the Independence of India, is the same eminent Muslim leader who offered battle to the British Government during the last World War. His Urdu journal, *Al-Hilal*, within two or three years of its publication had acquired such a name and influence by

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its fearless criticism of the British that Government thought it necessary to strangle the paper by forfeiture of its security and demand of a heavy fresh security, and then to intern him.

The internment, far from converting him, made him a more implacable opponent of British rule in India, and when he was released in 1920 he found that a large number of his countrymen also had been disillusioned and withdrawn their loyalty. The circumstances were thus propitious for the fulfilment of a long-cherished dream. Ten years before, his was a voice in the wilderness. He had to ask his co-religionists to retrace their steps, to understand that they were children of the same Motherland as the Hindus, and that both the communities must sink or swim together. On release he found that circumstances had so conspired as to make the communities decide to work together for good or ill, to suffer together, and to enjoy the fruit together. It was an agreeable surprise to him. Ever since then he has cast in his lot with his Hindu, Parsi, Sikh, Christian countrymen, and not the ugliest vicissitudes of the movement have made him alter his attitude even by a hair's breadth. "I stand exactly where I stood," he declared in his memorable Presidential Address at Ramgarh, "when in 1912 I addressed them [his co-religionists] on this issue. I have given thought to all those innumerable occurrences which have happened since then; my eyes have watched them, my

mind has pondered over them. These events did not merely pass me by; I was in the midst of them, a participant, and I examined every circumstance with care. I cannot be false to what I have myself seen and observed; I cannot quarrel with my own convictions; I cannot stifle the voice of my conscience. I repeat to-day what I have said throughout the entire period, that the ninety millions of Muslims of India have no other right course of action than the one to which I invited them in 1912." There had been innumerable ugly manifestations of communal discord, erstwhile friends and co-workers have left and gone over to the other camp, the gulf between the two communities has widened with the years, but he remains firm and steadfast as a rock, determined to stand even alone if the rest of the Muslim world were to forsake and revile him. His faith in the necessity of Hindu-Muslim Unity and in the common destiny of Hindus and Muslims burns brighter than ever before. It is this fact that has endeared him to the vast number of his countrymen, who by an overwhelming majority elected him to be the president of the Congress for this critical year. I propose to give in the pages that follow a brief sketch of the life and career of this remarkable man.

For Western readers, who do not know the Maulana Sahab at all, the work should have obvious value. Considerable study has been made of the life and work of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan by Western scholars. He was

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the earliest torch-bearer of Western learning among the Mussulmans and his forceful personality and volcanic energy have left an indelible impress on Muslim India. That circumstance by itself should have been enough to attract the attention of Western scholars and compel them to acquaint the Western world with his life and work. But there was another and more powerful reason. If he worked a revolution in the Muslim mind, he also struck the Englishman as one of the staunchest supporters of British rule in India. In a sense, therefore, their effort to acquaint the Western world with Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's work was by way of fulfilment of a debt they owed to the Muslims of India. The Maulana Saheb has been a rebel against British rule for over a quarter of a century. But he has been a non-violent rebel and he has not a trace of ill-will against the British people. It is therefore necessary for Western readers, especially the British, to know something about him. For the time will surely come when the British people will realize that intrepid souls like Gandhi, Nehru and the Maulana, who rebelled against British Imperialism, rendered through that very rebellion an inestimable service to the British people.

For Indian readers who have the cause of Hindu-Muslim Unity at heart, anything that can promote it, in however small a measure, should be of distinct value. We have outlived the days of speeches, conferences and resolutions. Each one of us has to be an exemplar,



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however humble, of what a servant of his Motherland ought to be. Unless in thought, word and deed we live the message of communal peace and harmony, true unity will not come and without it independence will be impossible and, even if possible, not worth having. The Maulana has, above everything else, lived that message, and therefore a proper appreciation of his life and work should serve as a small contribution to the great cause.

## II

### A NOBLE ANCESTRY

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad traces his descent from an ancestor who made a name for himself in the reign of the Moghul Emperor Akbar. This ancestor's name was Shaikh Jamaluddin Dehlavi, referred to in Muslim annals as Rahimatullah Ale. The last two epithets signify a saint on whom the grace of God has descended. He not only led a saintly and unworldly life, but was a divine of great repute, having to his credit a number of books which are held in high esteem to this day. Among these is a commentary on the most trustworthy text of the Hadis (Islamic Traditions) which is regarded as an authority by which Muslim divines swear. He had numerous disciples, among whom was Khane Azam, the brother of the Emperor Akbar. The Emperor Akbar, it is said, wanted to give royal recognition to his learning by placing him at the head of the central College of Theology. He would fain have given him other rewards, but he declined them all. Then there came in his saintly and unpretentious life an occasion when even he had to assert himself against the royal will.

This incident compels for a moment a peep into the life and times of Akbar. Akbar's toleration for all re-

ligions is known to history. He who taught him this toleration was Mulla Mubarak, who had to suffer considerable ostracism at the hands of orthodox divines of the day. Abul Fazl, his son, therefore inculcated the value of toleration for all beliefs and it was from him that Akbar imbibed the spirit of impartial inquiry. This led to the establishment of an Ibadatkhana (prayer house), where the heads and scholars of various religions were invited to come and hold free discussions. Abul Fazl once proposed as a subject of discussion that the King should be regarded not only as the temporal head but also as the spiritual guide of his subjects. The immediate occasion for this, explained the *Maulana to me*, was quite interesting. With his profound knowledge of Moghul history, the Maulana said: "There had been a quarrel in Mathura between Hindus and Muslims, and some Hindus had razed to the ground a mosque. Akbar wanted to save the Hindus and pleaded that they should be forgiven. But the Muslim divines were up in arms against them. Mulla Mubarak, in order to reduce the influence of the Muslim divines, thought of this clever way of having a proposition discussed and established by the consent of the divines themselves." Now, how could the Muslim divines resist a proposition which affected the authority of Akbar? "They came to a decision," says an historian, "which though they called a compromise gave away in fact the whole question. They drew up a docu-

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ment in which the Emperor was certified to be a just ruler, and as such was assigned the rank of a *Mujtahid*, that is, an infallible authority in all matters relating to Islam." Abul Fazi's father, Mulla Mubarak, signed the document and invited the other principal divines in the land to do likewise. The divines in Agra, Jaunpur and other places signed the document, and so did some of the divines in Delhi. But Shaikh Jamaluddin, the ancestor of the subject of this memoir, refused to sign the document, along with a few others who followed his lead. Whether he incurred the wrath of the Emperor we have no knowledge, but the ancestor left India and repaired to Mecca.

"So it is your earliest known ancestor," said I to the Maulana, "who has left the proud legacy of Satyagraha for you."

"You can certainly say so," said the Maulana, with a smile, "it was an instance of Satyagraha. But for that matter I can give you another instance in the life of a later ancestor."

"I should be grateful," said I. And the Maulana proceeded to tell me in brief the story of other ancestors. "I am the ninth or tenth in paternal descent from Shaikh Jamaluddin," he said. "I need not bother you with the whole genealogy, but I may say with thankfulness that the popular belief that wealth and learning do not endure beyond three or four consecutive ancestors has been falsified in the case of my

family. I can say that there was not one of my ancestors but was noted for his learning and *sufism* (mysticism). I shall tell you the story of Shaikh Muhammad, an ancestor who flourished in the time of Emperor Jehangir. Someone started the practice of doing *Koarnish* (obeisance) to the Emperor, and all—even the divines—were expected to do likewise. Most of the divines in Delhi agreed to follow the practice. Not so Shaikh Muhammad, my ancestor. That kind of obeisance, he said, is due only to God and cannot be given to an earthly king. Shaikh Jamaluddin, as you know, escaped without any dire consequence. But not so Shaikh Muhammad. He was sentenced to be imprisoned in the Fort of Gwalior for four years for thus refusing to bend the knee to Baal.”

“For generations,” added the Maulana, “it remained a kind of family tradition not to accept any office or place of power. Later Shaikh Sarajuddin, a great-grandfather, accepted the Chief Judgeship and since his time the tradition may be said to have been broken. Those who followed him began to accept offices and my grandfather was the last of the Rukn-ul-Mudarassin (Pillars of Learning) appointed by a Moghul Emperor.”

A certain amount of legitimate pride that is born of a noble ancestry and an aristocracy of learning may thus be said to run in the Maulana Saheb’s blood. Indeed, in one respect he has gone one better than his proud ancestors. Endowed with a lofty intellect and

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learning which if not unequalled is certainly unsurpassed, he has collected round himself no disciples, as many of his ancestors and even his own father did. With a reserve that is often mistaken for conceited aloofness, he has chosen to live severely alone buried in his books and content with being his own student and disciple.

### III

#### PARENTAGE AND EARLY YEARS

The Maulana's father, Muhammad Khairuddin, carried out in his life all the traditions of the ancient sire, Shaikh Jamaluddin. Like him he was both a learned divine and a *sufi* (mystic). He wrote numerous books in Arabic and Persian, but his life and temperament were coloured more by the stoic simplicity and contemplation of the *Sufis*. He had thousands of disciples, not only in Delhi but in Gujarat, Kathiawad and Bombay in the west and in Calcutta in the east.

He might well have lived his pious and learned life in Delhi and pursued the noble profession of his forefathers. But even the pious could not live in those days unmolested. What happened in Delhi, after the fall of that city in 1857, has left a dark stain on British military history. The rebels had no doubt indulged in violence, but those who vanquished them beat their ghastliest record. "All the city people found within the walls when our troops entered," records Montgomery Martin, "were bayoneted on the spot; and the number was considerable, as you may suppose when I tell you that in some houses forty and fifty persons were hiding. These were not

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mutineers, but residents of the city, who trusted to our well-known mild rule for pardon. I am glad to say they were disappointed." "Harmless citizens were shot clasping their hands for mercy. Trembling old men were cut down. . . . The people of Delhi had expiated, many times over, the crimes of the mutineers. Tens of thousands of men and women and children were wandering for no crime homeless over the country. What they had left behind was lost to them for ever; for the soldiers, going from house to house and from street to street, ferreted out every article of value, and smashed to pieces whatever they could not carry away" (Holmes). Mr. C. F. Andrews has recorded in his biographical sketch of Zakauallah, how that pious man's family suffered without any fault whatsoever, and Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, who helped the British during those days more than any other single man, found that when he went to Delhi his uncle had been murdered and his mother had to seek refuge in a servant's house. The Maulana's father was one of the thousands who fled for their lives. He thought it wise to leave this troubled land and retire to Mecca. With this end in view he left Delhi as soon as it was subdued and went to Rampur, where Nawab Yusuf Ali Khan, who had sided with the British and who was one of the disciples of the Maulana's father, made arrangements for his safe journey to Bombay and thence to Mecca.



Those were the days of Sultan Abdul Majid in Turkey. He had heard of Maulana Muhammad Khairuddin's learning and invited him to Constantinople. Many of his books were, thanks to the Sultan's patronage, published in Cairo. On return from Constantinople he helped in collecting contributions for building Ain Zubaida, the famous Canal in Mecca, which was built at the cost of 11 lakhs of rupees collected from his numerous disciples and friends in India and abroad. In Mecca he had married the daughter of Shaikh Mahomed Zahir Wetri, who was one of the most learned of the divines there. Of this good lady the subject of our memoir was born in 1888. Thus not only from his father's side but from his mother's side too he has the grand legacy of learning. Both families belonged to the proud Shaikh stock.

When Maulana Khairuddin returned to Mecca, a number of Mussalmans from Kathiawad, who were his disciples and who had gone on a pilgrimage to Mecca, pleaded with him to return to India for the benefit of his many disciples there. He yielded to their importunate demands and returned to Bombay in 1880. Between the years 1880 and 1892 he must have performed a number of voyages to and fro between Bombay and Mecca.

The boy's early years were thus spent in Arabia, until 1898, when his father, yielding to the pressure of Haji Abdul Wahid, a disciple, came and settled in Calcutta.

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Arabic was the Maulana's mother tongue, as his mother knew no other language. But from his father he learnt Urdu and had therefore a good grounding in both these languages when he came with his father to Calcutta. Here he was sent to no school but learnt from his father and Arabic scholars who were his father's friends. His progress in his studies was phenomenal. *Darse Nizami* is a full course in Arabic and Persian—languages, philosophy, logic, arithmetic, geography and history—which takes a very good student ten years and an average student fourteen years to complete. Young Abul Kalam took only four years to finish the course—he had, of course, the advantage of a thorough grounding in Arabic before he came to India—and began actually to impart his learning to others. Part of the curriculum is a kind of teachership course. No course is regarded as complete and no certificate as *Alim* is issued unless and until the candidate has proved his capacity to teach the same course to a number of pupils. The young Abul Kalam was thus a pupil-teacher at the age of fourteen. He has told me a delicious story of those days. "I had," he said, "among my pupils an old Pathan with a venerable beard. The poor man was rather dull-witted and I had not the patience commensurate to his slowness. For days I had tried hard to din into his head the distinction between *Kayas* (Deductive) and *Istakra* (Inductive) logic. I explained the distinction between reasoning

from the general to the particular and vice versa by saying that '*Kayas* is coming down from above and *Istakra* is going up from below.' I thought that was the easiest way to make him remember. The next day I asked him to explain the distinction. He had got it all the wrong way. I lost my temper and flung the book in his face, saying: 'You are never going to learn, get back home and eat grass.' The old Pathan said nothing but went without his meal the whole day. When my father came to know about this he was in a towering rage. He immediately called me and sternly said: 'Aren't you ashamed of your conduct? Don't you see that he is as old as your father? Go and apologize to him immediately and implore him to take his food.' The old Pathan behaved as though nothing had happened. He said I was his teacher and had every right to punish him and that there was no occasion for me to ask for his forgiveness. This made me all the more ashamed of myself, and I did not leave him until I had made him eat his meal."

The main formative influence of these tender years was that of his father from whom he may be said to have inherited many of his habits and his temperament. "My father was of a severely retiring temperament. He had thousands of disciples who would come to see him, but I never saw him go out to call on anyone except on the Molud Shareef Day (the Prophet's birthday) or the Id Day, and on those days too the

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visit was confined to only one disciple. There was a stern simplicity about everything in the house. He had an utter dislike of things modern, and there was no furniture but a mat on which guests of the highest to the lowest station in life were invited to sit. Among these were men like Nawabs and the son of Tipu Sultan. His dress, like his life, was of stoic simplicity and I never saw him wear a coat with buttons. Dreading as he did the very smell of modern civilization, giving us children any British training was farthest from his thoughts. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan had led the standard of revolt against the forces of conservatism and made fervent appeals to the Muslim community to go in for a study of English and modern science. My father would not tolerate this and made me and my brother follow the old way of education. It was therefore out of the question for me to think of going to an English school. He, however, wanted me to acquire a name among the most learned and so sent me in 1905 to Egypt at his own expense for advanced Arabic studies in the famous Al Azhar University of Cairo. I stayed there for two years and returned to India in 1907. It was only after the death of my father in 1909 that at the instance of a friend I began to learn English with the help of a grammar and a dictionary." "But," added the Maulana, "I am not sorry that my father did not send me to an English school. I lost nothing and I think I gained much from having to depend on my

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own resources to learn the English I needed to learn. I saved plenty of time and energy and learnt only the things I should."

As I have said before, the Maulana's father had thousands of disciples. There was among these quite a fair proportion of Hindus. They put him all kinds of questions, and he opened out before them with the same warmth and kindness as before his Muslim disciples. There is thus nothing surprising in the son growing into an unflinching advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity.

#### IV

#### A PRODIGY

Though young Abul Kalam inherited from his father his retiring nature, his insatiable thirst for knowledge in all spheres would not let him reconcile himself to the life of a divine. He established contact with the outside world through books and newspapers and by interesting himself in the live controversies of the day. He seems to have been a born writer and journalist, as before he was out of his teens he had several journals to his credit. *Lisanus Sidq (The Voice of Truth)* was his first venture in this direction, issued when he was barely fourteen years of age. No subject seemed to be beyond his understanding and in no matter would he shrink from uttering the harsh truth. He would express himself fearlessly on all topics and would not hesitate even to review books by writers of repute. He thus happened to write a critical review of the *Life of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan* by the great Urdu scholar and poet Khwaja Altaf Hussain Hali. This attracted wide attention, but evidently no man of note had yet met this rising author and journalist.

It appears that about the same period he was invited to deliver an important public speech. He had already

addressed small audiences and spoken before literary circles, but to be invited to address a distinguished audience in Lahore was for him a unique occasion. There is in Lahore an association called the Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam, which had invited the editor of the sparkling journal *Lisanus Sidq* to deliver the annual address in 1904, without apparently knowing who the editor was. The audience at the meeting included distinguished people like the great poet Hali, the author of the work referred to in the foregoing paragraph, the great Urdu prose writer Nazir Ahmed, the brilliant poet Shaikh Muhammad Iqbal and others. The subject of the lecture was "The Rational Basis of Religion," and no one in his wildest dreams would have imagined that a stripling of fifteen or sixteen would dare to address a learned audience on such a difficult subject as the one set for the year. When the speaker was introduced, the poet Hali, whose book the speaker had reviewed in detail, thought that the lad must be the son of the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad! There was no limit to his astonishment when he came to know that the lad was no other than the famous Maulana himself, the editor of *Lisanus Sidq*. The speech was to them even a greater surprise and the lad made for himself that day a name among the Muslim intelligentsia as the coming man in Muslim India. The poet Hali described him as "an old head on young shoulders."

Earlier than this, at the age of fourteen, he had

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tried his hand quite successfully at poetry and even issued a journal called *Nerange Alam*, which published poetry composed by rising Urdu poets. He would not only write poetry for this journal but even take part in what are known as *mushairas*—poetic contests. At a place near Garden Reach these poets—those who were budding and those in full bloom—used to meet and indulge in these delectable poetic gymnastics. Recurring or rhyming words in the latter half of a couplet would be announced at a meeting, and the poets would be called upon to produce full couplets or a string of them making up a poem or a stanza. Our young poet would always take part in these contests, and always come out with flying colours. Nadirkhan, a pupil of the great poet Ghalib, old in years and wisdom, could not bring himself to believe that this little boy could be producing his own poetry. He felt sure the boy was plagiarizing or was perhaps acting as somebody's understudy who wanted to bring the child forward into unmerited fame. One day as our young poet was inspecting books at a bookshop, Nadirkhan happened to pass by. He accosted the young man with these words: "Hallo, you do roll out couplet upon couplet in our *mushairas*, but how am I to know they are your own genuine compositions? You may, for aught I know, be getting them done by someone else and palming them off as yours on us. But come along, I have a ready test to-day. Here is a *tarah*—*Yad na ho, shad na ho, abad na ho*. Out with



the couplets." The young poet was very much put out, but his eagerness to vindicate himself got the better of his anger and immediately he rolled out couplet after couplet to the utter amazement of Nadirkhan, who threw all decorum to the winds and started dancing and shouting with joy: "Subhan Allah, Subhan Allah," right in front of the shop and in the midst of the bazaar. Old Nadirkhan confessed that he whom he had so long looked upon as a pretender was a better poet than many he knew. It may be mentioned in passing that "Azad" was the pseudonym adopted by the young poet, and it has survived the period of poetry.

But Abul Kalam Azad was not a man to rest content with these easy laurels. The journals of poetry and literary criticism were just pleasant pastimes, not worthy of concentrating all one's energies on. The canker of inquiry had begun its work. The spirit of questioning was awake, and he had already begun to ask himself whither he was drifting. The sojourn in Iraq and Syria and Egypt in 1905-7 had stimulated this spirit, and on return he had found the province of Bengal-seething with discontent, ringing with new cries and ready to hurl defiance at those in authority. Bengal had been partitioned and the youthful mind of Abul Kalam would find no peace until he also had given his share to the movement that was in full swing. Abul Kalam met some of the anarchists and terrorists

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of those days, and frankly his leanings were definitely towards them. How far he had committed himself I have not inquired, but he had already become an object of suspicion and the Criminal Intelligence Department were watching him.

But perhaps the thing that was uppermost in his mind was the future of Islam and the ways and means of ameliorating the condition of his co-religionists. The first effect of Sir Syed Ahmed's writings was to stimulate this desire to serve the community, the desire to broaden one's outlook, to study the prevailing currents of thought and to form one's own opinion on matters of moment. He had indeed inherited a great intellectual and spiritual legacy, but was that enough to satisfy the thirst of the spirit? The old orthodoxy seemed to be narrow and even faith in God and the accepted tenets suffered a rude shock. The more he heard and read, the more he was inclined to doubt what he had learnt and taken for granted and for a moment all the old moorings seemed to have snapped. He studied the Qurân again, examined the teachings afresh, and in the calm light of his own dispassionate thinking, faith was revived; the thought, which had for a moment possessed him, of putting an end to his own life vanished like an ugly dream, and a new vista of service and purposeful life appeared before him. The old orthodoxy had fled but it had not left a vacuum. A new belief had come, as a result of the spirit's wrestling

with the doubts and suspicions that had arisen in the mind. A radical spirit of reform and even revolution was born. The great father who had given him education and sent him abroad for further studies was now no more. The boy was left free to build a modern edifice on the ancient foundations that the father had laid for him. Whether he would have welcomed the direction in which the intellectual energy of the son was now running it is difficult to say and perhaps futile to speculate.

The concluding paragraph of his introduction to his translation of the Qurân may be reproduced in this connection. It gives us a glimpse into the processes of his thought and also affords a striking instance of his elusive style:

“It is the vogue among scholars and critics these days to distinguish the ancient from the modern. But I recognize no such distinction. The ancient belongs to me as a legacy from my forefathers, and so far as the modern is concerned I have carved my own way. The modern trends of thought are as familiar to me as every nook and corner of the ancient.

A wassailer I have been,  
Strict puritan too,  
Both, in my eye,  
Are one and the same.<sup>1</sup>

“From the very first day I refused to be content

<sup>1</sup> Free rendering of verse quoted by the Maulana.

## A PRODIGY

With the legacy that family, education and environment  
had given me; the trammels of conservatism could not  
bind me in any way, and the thirst for inquiry never  
left me in any walk of life,

There was not a nook for knowledge  
But my passion led me to explore;  
My barn was full and yet  
My grainpicking went on as before.<sup>1</sup>

“There is no conviction of mine but was riddled with  
all the thorns of doubt; there is no spiritual belief but  
has passed through all the vicissitudes of unbelief. I  
have quaffed the poison from every poison-jar even as  
I have tried all the antidotes that the science of healing  
has prescribed. When I was thirsty my thirst was  
unlike that of others; nor was the peace that has filled  
me since, obtained from the common spring.

Long and weary was Khizar’s way  
To the spring of Life;  
I have slaked my thirst  
From another spring.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Free rendering of Urdu and Persian verses quoted by the  
Maulana,

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Before I describe the emergence of the young Maulana on the political horizon of India, I must make a rapid survey of the British policy *vis-à-vis* the Hindus and Muslims and the resultant Hindu-Muslim relations when he appeared on the scene. The Indian Rebellion of 1857, unorganized and confined to parts of North India as it was, may be said to have given the Britisher the key to the consolidation of the foundation of British rule in India. Though there had been wars between the Hindus and the Muslims the Rebellion had found them united for a common object, however vague it was, and one can trace the beginnings of the policy of Divide and Rule in the utterances of the British rulers of those days like Sir Bartle Frere. But the policy remained quiescent so long as the Nationalist movement had not been started. The starting of the movement gave the British rulers the signal for alarm. Lord Dufferin started the double game of uttering on the one hand honeyed words to the protagonists of the Nationalist movement and on the other hand, words of warning to the Mussalmans. He invited the late A. O. Hume, father of the Indian National Congress,

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to make the Congress a political organization and invited Congress delegates to garden parties, but at the same time he made up his mind that "India is not a country in which the machinery of European democratic agitation can be applied with impunity," and said in his minute on Reforms: "Having regard to the relation in numbers, in condition, in status, and in qualifications for Government of what may be called the Europeanized or educated section of the Indian people as compared with the masses that constitute the bulk of the nation, I am convinced that we should be falling into a great error, if miscalculating the force and value of the Congress movement and the influence of its supporters and advocates, whether in the Press or elsewhere, we were to relax in the slightest degree our grasp of the supreme administration of the country." It was he who started the division of India into two irreconcilable camps. "But perhaps," he said, "the most patent characteristic of our Indian cosmos is its division into two mighty communities as distinct from each other as the poles asunder in their religious faith, their historical antecedents, their social organization and their natural aptitudes; on the one hand, the Hindus, numbering 190 millions, with their polytheistic beliefs, their temples adorned with images and idols, their veneration for the sacred cow, their elaborate caste distinctions and their habits of submission to successive conquerors—on the other hand, the Ma-

homedans, a nation of 50 millions, with their monotheism, their iconoclastic fanaticism, their animal sacrifices, their social equality and their remembrance of the days when enthroned at Delhi they reigned supreme from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin." It would be difficult to pack in one paragraph more mischievous half-truths than Lord Dufferin had done. But it gives one an idea of the kind of propaganda he had started by "putting himself in communication with all the principal persons of influence in different parts of India representing the educated section of the [Muslim] community," and then he complacently reports that "the Mahomedans have also certainly been brought much more into sympathy with the Government than they were before." Clever and insidious attempts were made to cultivate among the Muslims class hostility against the Congress, and Sir Auckland Colvin, Lieutenant-Governor of the N.W. Provinces, argued with Mr. A. O. Hume about the Congress provoking a counter-agitation among the Muslims. With him the wish was father to the thought.

But there is no doubt that a kind of counter-agitation had been started among the Mussalmans, and it had its protagonist in one no less than Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, a dynamic personality who had the courage of his convictions and the determination to carry them out. Sir Syed was a giant among men. The thoroughness with which he carried out his mission of bringing

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about an intellectual revolution among the Mussalmans, in face of great odds in the shape of fanatical orthodox opposition against the introduction of Western culture, Western education and Western science among his co-religionists, bore ample fruit. His zeal for the cause led him sometimes to make the most extravagant statements, as, for instance, when he said in one of his letters from London (October 15, 1869): "Without flattering the English I can truly say that the natives of India, high and low, merchants and petty shopkeepers, educated and illiterate, when contrasted with the English in education, manners, and uprightness, are as like them as a dirty animal is to an able and handsome man. The English have reason for believing us in India to be imbecile brutes." Evidently the glamour of Western amenities, and freedom and the education of English women had dazzled him. "What I have seen and seen daily is utterly beyond the imagination of a native of India," he wrote. "The fatal shroud of complacent self-esteem is wrapt around the Mahomedan community. They remember the old tales of their ancestors, and think that there are none like themselves. The Mahomedans of Egypt and Turkey are daily becoming more civilized. Until the education of the masses is pushed on as it is here, it is impossible for a native to become civilized and honoured. Those who are bent on improving and bettering India must remember that the only way of compassing this is by



having the whole of arts and sciences translated into their own language." With this object in view he went about from place to place in North India harping passionately on the theme of Western education, until he succeeded in founding at Aligarh the M.A.O. College in 1880, which later developed into a university. He imported professors from England and did all in his power to give the *alumni* of the College a Western bent.

But whereas he brought about this wholesome revolution among the Muslims, he also assiduously cultivated in them a loyal bent. "Loyalty to British rule was with him synonymous," says Sir Valentine Chirol, "with loyalty to all the high ideals which he himself pursued and set before his students. . . . So great and enduring was the hold of Sir Seyyid Ahmed's teachings upon the progressive elements in Mahomedan India that the All India Muslim League was founded in 1905 almost avowedly in opposition to the subversive activities which the Indian National Congress was beginning to develop." Indeed, in a letter that he wrote to Major-General Graham in December 1888, he said that he had "undertaken a heavy task against the so-called National Congress, and formed an Association, the 'Indian United Patriotic Association,' the work of which is greater than the other works." This association had as its members Rajas, Maharajas, Zamindars, and these promoted memorials to the

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Government to the effect that the Association was opposed to the political object and activities of the Congress. At the same time as the Congress was held in Calcutta he organized and held a session of the Muslim Educational Conference at a different place in order to wean the Mussalmans away from the Congress. Opposition to the Congress and support of British rule became the slogan of what has since been known as the Aligarh school of thought. Sir Syed did not perhaps despise the Congress as a Hindu organization, but he had apprehensions that if the Muslims had anything to do with the Congress politics his whole lifework would be ruined. The British found the followers of the Aligarh school of thought fit instruments for the promotion of their policy of Divide and Rule, so much so that Lord Minto was in a position to take the active step of having a "command performance" (to use Maulana Mahomed Ali's words) in the shape of a deputation headed by His Highness the Aga Khan to wait upon him to press the demand of communal representation. It was in the spirit of opposition to the "subversive activities" of the Congress, records Sir Valentine Chirol, "that the influential deputation headed by the Aga Khan . . . waited on Lord Minto to press upon the Government of India the Mahomedan view of the political situation created by the Partition of Bengal, lest political concessions should be hastily made to the Hindus which would pave the way for the

ascendancy of a Hindu majority equally dangerous to the stability of British rule and to the interests of the Mahomedan minority whose loyalty was beyond dispute. It was again in the same spirit, and fortified by the promise which Lord Minto had on that occasion given them, that they insisted, and insisted successfully, on the principle of community representation being applied for their benefit in the Indian Councils Act of 1909." That Maulana Mahomed Ali was not far wrong in describing this as a "command performance" is proved by the following words of Lord Morley in a letter to Lord Minto: "I won't follow you again into our Mahomedan dispute. Only I respectfully remind you once more that it was *your* early speech about their extra claims that first started the M. [Muslim] hare." Apart from Lord Morley's indirect testimony there is some direct testimony too in this connection. I owe it to the Maulana himself. The deputation, as well as the idea of demanding separate representation, had not its birth in Aligarh. It was born in Simla. Mr. Archbold was the principal of M.A.O. College, Aligarh, at that time. This gentleman was the connecting link between Simla and Aligarh. He went to Simla, waited on Lord Minto, and on return he prepared Nawab Mohsin-Ul-Mulk, Honorary Secretary of the College, for taking the deputation. H.H. the Aga Khan had just left India for England. Before he had reached Aden, Nawab Mohsin-Ul-Mulk wired him to come back, in order

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that he might lead the proposed deputation to the Viceroy. He immediately returned to Bombay. We can read the whole story now in the writings of Mr. Archbold himself. Lord Morley had read only Lord Minto's speech. But perhaps he did not know what was actually going on behind the curtain in India.

It was in this atmosphere that young Abul Kalam Azad found himself on his return from Egypt.

His father, as we have seen, had bitter memories of the Rebellion of 1857, and must have talked to the son about those days when revenge had lost all sense of proportion and treated friend and foe alike with the same brutal severity. The father, as a result, had turned foe to everything Western. Not so the son. He had no doubt that Sir Syed Ahmed Khan had done a great service to the Muslim community by impressing on it the necessity of getting out of the narrow grooves of orthodox learning and theology and of profiting by Western education and sciences. But he also felt—what few Muslims felt in those days—that Sir Syed Ahmed had unconsciously made himself a tool of British Imperialism by stopping the Muslims from all political activities and by opposing the Congress. On the one hand, he had hindered the political regeneration of the whole country, and on the other he had directed the footsteps of the Mussalmans along ways that fostered in them a slavish mentality instead of self-respect, high-mindedness and breadth of political outlook.

In 1908, when the Maulana was only twenty, his mind began to undergo rapid changes. One of these big changes was due to the political state of affairs in India. His home land was Bengal, which was then seething with discontent and full of a new political awakening. He noticed that India was presenting to the world two kinds of contradictory pictures at one and the same time. On the one hand were the Hindus, whose minds were fired with a new patriotism and dreaming dreams of freedom, and no repression by Government could stifle them. They were unflinchingly sacrificing their youthful lives on the altar of patriotism. On the other hand were the Muslims, who had set their face against all political struggle and had become willing tools in the hands of Government determined to crush the national movement. When Young India was marching ahead under the banner of freedom from the British bondage, the slogan of the Muslims was loyalty to Government. This contrast appalled young Abul Kalam. He could not tolerate seeing his co-religionists play this sorry part. He made up his mind to work a revolution among them, in whatever way it was possible. How was such a revolution to be brought about? He pondered over the problem for several years. Two things came upon him with all the force of a growing conviction. In order to bring about this revolution, the first thing was to create a spirit of rebellion against the policy of the Aligarh school and

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the second thing was to uproot from the Muslim mind the loyalty to British rule that had been sedulously fostered by the so-called British friends of Muslims.

So after a brief period of preparation he announced the publication of *Al Hilal* (*The Crescent*), a weekly to serve the Muslim world. The first issue was published on the 1st of June, 1912. He was only twenty-four then, but he had already been accepted as a "Maulana" (*lit.* our leader) by the Muslim world. Maulana Mahomed Ali wrote thus in his weekly *Comrade* welcoming the *Al Hilal*: "We can well understand the enormous labour and expense that Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, its talented editor, must have gone through before launching this weekly journal. It strikes a new line in journalism by including pictorial illustrations as a permanent feature in its columns. The adoption of the Turkish type, though not exactly an innovation, is a welcome departure from the obsolete methods which in spite of their clumsiness and tedium still retain a paralysing hold on the Urdu Press of the country. Literary and scientific discussions and Muslim educational affairs will have a permanent space assigned to them, besides the regular presentment of the state of affairs in Turkey, Persia, Morocco and the Islamic world in general." This note of welcome does not, indeed, make any mention of the policy of this journal. But the reason is obvious. The policy of the *Comrade* then followed the lines of the Aligarh school of thought,

and anyone who started with the ambition of checking the prevailing current could not expect to find favour with it. But reckless of consequences and even at the risk of estranging some of his countrymen, the young Maulana started on his journalistic venture and from the very second week defined its objective. I am sorry that I have not been able to secure the old files of this journal, but I am told by the Maulana that the very first issues acted like explosives in the Muslim world and compelled them to consider seriously whether there was not something radically wrong in their way of thinking. Sir Syed Ahmed had fought a successful crusade against the forces of bigotry and darkness. The young Maulana decided to launch a crusade against the forces of political reaction and narrow communalism.

Soon after the Educational Conference held in Dacca in order to wean the Mussalmans away from the Congress, steps were taken to form the Muslim League with the deliberate object of promoting loyalty to the British Government and of fighting for the interests of the Muslims which were supposed to be jeopardized by the politically conscious Hindus. In his very first speech, I am told, Nawab Mushtaq Hussain, Secretary of the Aligarh College, who played a prominent part in organizing the Muslim League, declared that the sword of Islam would be always ready in the service of the British Raj. The Maulana swore opposition to this policy from the very start.

## VI

### INTERNMENT

The *Al Hilal* made its influence felt within a few weeks of its birth. Within six months its circulation had reached the figure of eleven thousand—a considerable figure if we remember that the annual subscription was Rs. 12 and the bulk of its readers were Mussalmans. The flutter that it had succeeded in creating in the loyal and reactionary dovecots may be measured by the fact that Sahebzada Aftab Ahmed Khan and others started an agitation against it and they partially succeeded in affecting its circulation in Calcutta, obviously because there were few in Bengal who could follow its classical Urdu. But its influence in the United Provinces steadily increased, and such was its popularity that study circles were formed where scores of people assembled together to hear the paper read out to them.

The *Al Hilal* not only made no secret of its political objective, but took a bold line in matters social and religious. There were riots in Ajodhya in 1913 arising out of the usual dispute over cow-slaughter, and the Maulana boldly told the Mussalmans that their insistence on the right of cow-slaughter was far from conducive to communal peace. His view was so strange



in those days that even his intimate friend Hakim Ajmal Khan fell foul of him and carried on a bitter controversy with him. It was only in 1920 that the good Hakim Saheb saw his error, confessed it to the Maulana, and became a whole-hogger in the matter like the Maulana himself. Maulana Mahomed Ali too was one of his strong opponents and critics. The influence of the paper was felt not only in India but abroad, and later European events so conspired that even its bitterest critics were convinced of the wisdom of the line taken up by the Maulana. Sir Valentine Chirol has in his own way summed up the situation rather tersely, and it may be appropriate to quote his own words:

“A new generation of young Mahomedans had nevertheless been growing up who knew not Seyyid Ahmed and regarded his teachings as obsolete. The lessons which they had learnt from their Western education were not his. They were much more nearly those that the more ardent spirits among the Hindus had imbibed, and they were ready to share with them the new creed of Indian Nationalism in its most extreme form. Other circumstances were tending to weaken the faith of the Mahomedan community in the goodwill, not only of the Government of India, but of the British Government. Even the most conservative Mahomedans were disappointed and irritated by the revision of the Partition of Bengal in 1911 when the

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predominantly Mahomedan Province of Eastern Bengal, created under Lord Curzon, was merged once more into a largely Hindu Bengal. The more advanced Mahomedans had been stirred by the revolutionary upheaval in Constantinople to seek contact with the Turkish Nationalist leaders who now ruled the one great Mahomedan Power in the world, and they learnt from them to read into British foreign policy a purpose of deliberate hostility to Islam itself inspired by dread of the renewed vitality it might derive from the returning consciousness in many Mahomedan countries of their own independent nationhood. In that light they see in the British occupation of Egypt, in the Anglo-French agreement with regard to Morocco, and the Anglo-Russian agreement with regard to Persia, and last, but not least, in the Italian invasion of Tripoli, the gradual development of a scheme in which all the powers of Christendom were involved for the extinction of the temporal power of Islam and, with it inevitably, according to orthodox doctrine, of its spiritual authority. The Ottoman Empire had been saved for a time by the protection extended to it for her own purposes by Germany who had alone stood between it and the disintegrating machinations of the 'European Concert' in Constantinople, bent on undermining the ascendancy of the ruling Mahomedan race by its menacing insistence on reforms for the benefit of the subject Christian races which could result only in the further

aggrandisement of the independent Christian states already carved out of the Sultans' former dominions in Europe and in the introduction of similar processes even into their Asiatic dominions. The Balkan wars of 1912-13 appeared to bear out the theory of a great European conspiracy directed against Turkey as "the sword of Islam," and whilst the sympathies of Indian Mahomedans of all classes and schools of thought were naturally enlisted in favour of their Turkish co-religionists, the leaders of the advanced Mahomedan party themselves went to Constantinople in charge of the Red Crescent funds collected in India and got into close personal touch with the Turkish Nationalists who ruled in the name of the Sultan but derived their authority from the 'Committee of Union and Progress.' The same party had in the meantime gone a long way towards capturing the All India Moslem League and bringing it into line with the advanced wing of the Indian National Congress."

The London Branch of the Muslim League appealed to the Mussalmans to cast in their lot with the Hindus, and men like Wilfrid Blunt advised Muslim friends to abandon the narrow communalist policy and to identify themselves with the political objective of the Indian National Congress. With the Maulana, however, it was not so much the foreign situation that weighed as the situation in India. For him the *mantram* of "loyalty" went against the grain and he had through-

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out set his face against it on the broad political ground. But though events were thus conspiring for a radical change in the Muslim outlook, men like Maulana Mahomed Ali were stoutly opposed to Muslims identifying themselves with the Congress in a common political objective. His attitude may be judged from his severe strictures on the appeal of the London Branch of the Muslim League: "Soft-headed and some self-advertising folk have gone about proclaiming that the Mussalmans should join the Congress because the Government had revoked the Partition of Bengal or because Persia and Turkey are in trouble. We are simply amused at this irresponsible fatuity. But when a responsible body like the London Branch of the All India Muslim League talks of close co-operation between Hindus and Muslims because the Mussalmans of Tripoli and Persia have been the victims of European aggression, we realize for the first time that even sane and level-headed men can run off at a tangent and confuse the issues. What has the Moslem situation abroad to do with the condition of the Indian Mussalmans? Either their interests come actually into conflict with those of the Hindus, or they have been all along guilty of a great political meanness and hypocrisy. Has the Indian situation undergone a change?"

The Indian situation had undergone no change, it was really the narrow outlook of the Indian Mussalmans that needed to undergo a change. Even from the

inception of the Indian National Congress there were not men wanting among the Mussalmans, men of light and leading like Mr. Justice Budroodeen Tyebji and Mr. Rahimatoola Sayani who, for good or ill, had decided to identify themselves with the Congress. Sheikh Raza Hussain had produced a *fatwa* (injunction) from the leader of the Sunni Mussalmans in Lucknow in support of the Congress and had declared that "it is not the Muslims but their official masters who are opposed to the Congress."

But now came a voice that made itself felt in the Muslim world. Scarcely had six months elapsed since the publication of *Al Hilal* when all educated Mussalmans were awakened to a new political sense. The leadership of the Aligarh School, which had hindered the political progress of the Mussalmans, and whose main plank had been unswerving loyalty to British rule, found itself quite helpless in the face of this new political awakening. Syed Wazir Hasan (later Justice Sir Wazir Hasan) was then the secretary of the Muslim League. In the beginning he had opposed *Al Hilal*, but when he saw the new awakening, he also consented to a change in the political creed of the League according to the needs of the day. He toured India specially with this object in view, and went to Calcutta and had long talks with the Maulana. And when in April 1913 the annual session of the All India Muslim League was held in Lucknow, the constitution of the League was

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amended and the creed of the League became "the attainment of *suitable* Self-Government for India" instead of "loyalty to British Government, and the attainment of the rights of the Mussalmans." The League for the first time came to have a political objective.

The Maulana did not want the word "suitable." He had emphasized the point that there should be no place for a declaration of loyalty in the constitution of the League. But the late Maulana Mahamed Ali opposed the Maulana. His words emphasizing the duty of loyalty sound quite strange to-day: "For becoming a Muslim it is enough for one to recite the *Kalemah* (affirmation of the faith) but once. Yet a pious Muslim does not stop there. He repeats the *Kalemah* daily. Nay, he remembers it on every occasion. Similarly, although we are loyal subjects of British Government, we should not be content with merely being loyal, we should affirm our loyalty every now and then, and in every activity of life."

The events in the West, too, had their share in creating the change that was rapidly coming over the Indian Muslim world. On the top of the events mentioned in the quotation from Sir Valentine Chirol came the World War, and events happened that shook even men like Maulana Mahomed Ali, who even whilst the war was on had declared: "Even if self-government were to be conceded to us, we would humbly tell Govern-

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ment this is no time for it, and we must for the present decline such concessions with thanks. Concessions are asked for and accepted in peace. We are not Russian Poles. We need no bribes!"

It is now well known that it was the very article in which he had made this declaration of loyalty that cost him the security and the consequent closing down of his paper and brought about his internment along with that of his brother. The Maulana's paper *Al Hilal* had during the war achieved a circulation of twenty-five thousand copies and it was being read in all parts of India. Its growing influence may be measured by two incidents which may be noted here. A member of the Indian Civil Service, Mr. Philby, while serving in Multan, was appointed specially to report on it to the Punjab Government. He happened to go to Calcutta as Secretary of the Board of Examiners for the Civil Service officers. He was so struck with the style of the *Al Hilal* that he sought an interview with the Maulana in order to pay his respects to him and to congratulate him on the masterly way in which it was being edited. It was due to his contact with the Maulana that he took up the study of Arabic and after going to Mesopotamia wrote the *Heart of Arabia*.

The Maulana's old connection with the revolutionary party in Bengal had already attracted the attention of the Criminal Intelligence Department, and Sir Charles Cleveland, its head, had always been on the lookout

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for material calculated to implicate him. As early as November 1914 the Maulana knew that the fate of his paper and along with it his own was hanging in the balance. For at the instance of Sir James Meston, Governor of the United Provinces, the *Pioneer* of Allahabad had published in November an editorial entitled "Pro-Germanism in Calcutta," in which it charged the Maulana with pro-German tendencies. It is a long article and throws a flood of light on the close attention with which the paper was being watched. This is how the paper is introduced to the reader:

"*Al Hilal* is a weekly illustrated newspaper published in the Urdu language in Calcutta, and is edited by a Delhi Mussalman named Abul Kalam. It has a large circulation among Mussalmans in these provinces, and probably in other parts of India. Ever since the war broke out, its attitude has been so strikingly pro-German that it must be a matter of amazement to all who read the paper that the Government has managed to tolerate its writings. Possibly this may be accounted for by the fact that the paper attracts little or no attention in Calcutta itself owing to its being published in Urdu, and there can be little doubt that this was one of the main causes which led the editor to choose Calcutta as the place of publication. Another reason may be that the style of the most mischievous articles is very allusive and full of veiled sneers and sarcasms and innuendoes, most of which either disappear or lose



their effect when translated into English, and it is not likely that many European officials read the paper in the original."

Then follow quotations from various articles, only one or two of which may here be given:

"In the history of the present War the forts of Antwerp have gained such historical distinction that military science has not abandoned them like their unlucky destiny, and apparently up to the present no defect or crudity has been discovered in their fortifications as in the case of Liège and Namur. They have been vanquished, but the realities of their strength and protectiveness remain intact, and instead of singing interminably about their faults and defects, a confession of the strength of the assailants has been made, and kind attention has for the first time been paid to truth and reality. Praise be to God that some of the critical faculty formerly lavished on finding out defects of the unfortunate defeated forts has been partly employed in disclosing the strange and wonderful artillery of the Germans, and it has been ascertained that all these marvellous results are due not to Germany but to its fort-shattering guns, which are 37 centimetres in diameter and hurl projectiles thirty maunds in weight. (Here follows a Persian quotation, 'We expected naught like this from this weak blade of grass.') It has been announced that British aid was sent to Antwerp, which went and enabled the despairing inhabitants to pass

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two nights in hope and joy. Their arrival was greeted with enthusiasm and praise and thanks were chanted in the churches. Yet this precious aid conferred no benefit on luckless Belgium, and owing to various adverse accidents British bravery did not get an opportunity of displaying those military excellences and martial superiorities which it had often shown in the plains of France. Still with great wisdom they managed to save a large part of themselves from destruction and arrived along with the fugitives from Antwerp and Ostend. . . .

"Now the real facts are clear as daylight, viz. that the information which the whole world possessed for years as to the astonishing powers and appliances of Germany is as correct now as it was before the War began. Germany is in possession of the whole of Belgium and has advanced as far as Paris. It is fighting with the Russians in Russia, and has advanced miles within its boundaries. Its African colonies have not yet been completely conquered and even the famous naval force of Japan has been unable to take Kiao Chau in two months. On the other side, not an inch of German territory has passed into the occupation of their enemies. The result is that the countries of the opponents of Germany have been turned upside down by the War, as is the case in Belgium and France and part of Russia, but in Germany itself there is no fighting, and thus its internal tranquillity and security and its

home trade and economic condition is [*sic*] just exactly as it was before. They are using their factories for turning out military supplies, they are forging guns and a hundred submarines are being got ready at one time. From this contrast, the present results of the War are plainly apparent. By capturing Antwerp and Ostend the position of Germany in the War has become very powerful and weighty, and the power opposed to it on the other side of the sea has had its road closed. Apparently half the task of Germany has been completed. It is free from anxiety in the direction of Belgium and the sea coast, and it will begin its advance afresh. It has placed mines in the river Scheldt, and will now wish to extend its influence especially over the English Channel."

The comment of the *Pioneer* on these and other extracts may be summed up in two sentences:

"The obvious intention of the writer of these lines is to make his co-religionists believe that Germany is invincible and that the power of the British Empire can do nothing to resist its attacks. . . . We may safely say that a Government which at such a time as the present allows a British subject to publish unchecked malicious insinuations against British soldiers and sailors at any rate may lay claim to the possession of a most un-Germanic spirit of toleration."

Whatever may be the facts, it is obvious that the Maulana wielded a powerful pen and his articles were

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packed with information not usually to be found even in English journals. Besides, he had the courage to tell unpalatable things about the Allies, without regard to consequences. That what he said and wrote was not quite so abominable as the *Pioneer* thought may be judged from the fact that the Government showed their "un-Germanic spirit of toleration" for over eighteen months after this article was published. Steps were taken to forfeit the security of the paper, and orders were then passed against the editor prohibiting him from entering the Punjab, the United Provinces, and Madras, and on April 7, 1915, the Bengal Government expelled him from his province. He repaired to Ranchi for reasons of health, where the Government of India interned him until the beginning of the year 1920.

Even during the internment he would go to the mosque and deliver there the Friday sermon. He was allowed to have books, and it was there that he wrote *Tazkira*, a volume of personal reminiscences. It is a masterpiece of elusive style that holds the reader until he gets to the end of the book, and yet I am told very few pages are devoted to giving any facts of his own life. Part of his great commentary on the Qurân was also written there, but of this more in a later chapter.

## VII

### THE FLOOD

The history of the three years 1919 to 1921 has been told by many writers, and by none so vividly and in such a superb style as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in his *Autobiography*.<sup>1</sup> I will not attempt to re-tell the moving story. They were days to which every Indian who has had a share, however humble or insignificant, in the struggle for his country's freedom looks back with pride and exultation. And everyone has his own story to tell. It would be easy to fill a volume with these stories, which however similar would not pall upon the reader, for men and women, young and old, and even little children played their parts in the epic drama, each in their own way.

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven.

I shall only touch upon the story of those years to the extent that it concerns the Maulana. When he was released from his internment in 1920 he beheld a spectacle for which he was hardly prepared. The Row-

<sup>1</sup> London. John Lane The Bodley Head.

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latt Act had found Gandhiji shaking himself free of almost a year's illness and hurling defiance against the proudest imperialist power in the world. At his call the crushed, withered, smothered and even dead humanity in cities and towns and villages had come to life. The non-violent nature of the struggle afforded scope even to the ignorant and the illiterate, to the poorest and even to the ailing. In parts of the Punjab the released flood of energy overflowed the bounds set by the author of the non-violent struggle. This was met by a British general, who in order to save the Empire indulged in savage butchery which the best Englishmen condemned with a sense of shame. But though he succeeded in slaughtering a few hundred innocent lives, his object of striking terror and frightfulness in the hearts of the people was frustrated. "It was reserved," says Maulana Mahomed Ali, "for General Dyer to break down entirely the barrier that Sir Syed Ahmed Khan had for temporary purposes erected more than thirty years previously, and to summon the Mussalmans of India to the Congress held at Amritsar in 1919 as the unsuspecting Herald of India's Nationhood. The bullets of his soldiery made no distinction between Hindu and Muslim, and clearly Providence had so designed things that a community even more loyal than the Mussalmans, namely our brave Sikh brothers, should also dye the sacred soil of their religious capital at Amritsar with their own blood

along with that of Hindu and Muslim martyrs. There was the Hand of God."

On the top of what was called the Punjab wrong came the Khilafat wrong. A British Prime Minister's pledge given to the Indian Mussalmans, in the hour of Britain's difficulty, to keep their holy places inviolate and free from the domination of a non-Muslim power was broken. Mussalmans rose to a man to protest against this intolerable wrong and to suffer the direst consequences. The people of India who had poured out men, money and material in order to help Britain win the war against Germany looked upon the Rowlatt Act as the height of ingratitude, and the Mussalmans who had fought, on foreign fields along with the Britisher, against men of their own faith looked upon the Khilafat wrong as an intolerable act of perfidy. They waited in deputation on the Viceroy, they took a deputation to England, and when they found that all these methods of negotiation had failed they took counsel together and accepted the remedy suggested by the nation's leader, Gandhiji. Non-co-operation was a remedy more striking, more effective, more natural than civil disobedience, which had been tried and found abortive a few months ago in the unprepared state of the country. But non-violence was the indispensable condition of non-co-operation. Were non-co-operation and non-violence in accordance with the dictates of Islam?

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad now came upon the

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field, with his vast learning, his matchless powers of eloquence and persuasion and his modern outlook, not vouchsafed to the divines who were equally learned but who had not looked outside their learning. He had been released from internment in the nick of time. More than any other Muslim leader, though he was the youngest of them all, he was a tower of strength to Gandhiji. Non-co-operation was a novel weapon, and combined with non-violence it must have struck them as a most difficult one to wield. I requested the Maulana to furnish the details of those preliminary discussions among Muslim leaders which finally led to their acceptance of non-co-operation, and I am indebted to his vivid memory for these details:

"I happened to meet Gandhiji for the first time in Delhi on January 18, 1920. All Hindu and Muslim leaders had assembled there in order to wait in deputation upon the Viceroy and place before Government the sentiments of the Indian Muslims with regard to Turkey. Lokamanya Tilak, too, was in Delhi. As a member of the deputation I had already put my signature on the memorial to be submitted to the Viceroy. But I could not bring myself to consent to go to Government House. The late Maulana Mahomed Ali and other friends were insistent that I should join the deputation, but my feeling was that the deputation could not serve any useful purpose.

"The deputation did wait on the Viceroy, however,



and as was but to be expected with little result. The only assurance that the Viceroy gave was that if it was decided to send the deputation to London the Government of India would provide all the facilities. It was thereupon decided that the late Maulana Mahomed Ali should lead the deputation. He was ready to go. But another question now arose: whether the Mussalmans should be content merely with sending this deputation or whether there was anything more to be done. I was of opinion that these old methods of begging, petitioning, waiting in deputation and so on could not be of much avail. We had to try to find some means of exerting direct pressure. But most people fought shy of this line of thinking. They had no constructive suggestion to offer, but were ready to pick holes if anything concrete was proposed.

"The matter was discussed for six long hours in the late Hakim Ajmal Khan's drawing-room, but without any result. Gandhiji thereupon proposed that a sub-committee of two or three people should be appointed to decide the matter in consultation with him. Their decision would then be placed before the bigger committee. Hakim Saheb and I were selected to form this sub-committee. We accompanied Gandhiji to the late Principal Rudra's house and were closeted with him for three hours. It was here that non-co-operation was conceived. Gandhiji placed before us a detailed programme, and I had no difficulty in agreeing with him

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in every detail. It was quite clear to me that there was no other effective or correct line of action than this.

"The next day the members of the deputation met again, and Gandhiji explained to them his proposal. There was still hesitancy on their part. The late Maulanas Abdul Bari, Mahomed Ali and Shaukat Ali could not yet make up their minds and wanted time. The late Hakim Saheb, however, gave me his full support. About this time the Khilafat conference was being held in Meerut, so Gandhiji and I proceeded from Delhi to Meerut, and the non-co-operation programme was placed before the public for the first time at this conference. The second Khilafat conference was thereafter held towards the end of February in Calcutta under my presidentship, and I recommended in my presidential address the same programme for the acceptance of the Muslims."

The atmosphere for the special Congress at Calcutta and the Annual Congress at Nagpur was thus prepared, and the resolution on the various items of non-co-operation—boycott of councils, schools and law courts—was carried by an overwhelming majority.

The rest of the story is soon told. There were meetings all over the country attended by hundreds of thousands of men and women, and addressed by Gandhiji and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, in one province by the Ali brothers, in another by Desha-bandhu Das and Pandits Motilal and Jawaharlal.

Phenomenal was the response. Gandhiji worked according to time-table. A crore of rupees (nearly a million pounds) were collected on the final date announced for the collection. Boys and girls emptied schools and colleges, and numerous lawyers gave up their practice, many of them for life. Both the great Pandits, Desha-bandhu Das, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Babu Rajendra-prasad, Shri Rajagopalachar were among the distinguished lawyers who renounced their incomes of thousands of rupees per month and dedicated themselves for the service of the country. Women flocked to the meetings in their thousands and poured their wealth and precious ornaments and jewellery into Gandhiji's begging bowl.

The Maulana's matchless eloquence held audiences spellbound. He was as much in demand at ordinary meetings as well as at extraordinary meetings of Muslim divines. In a special conference of the divines at Lahore, attended by over a thousand divines from all the important places in the country, they resolved to appoint Maulana Abul Kalam Azad the Imam—supreme spiritual head—for all India. There could not have been a greater honour for a Muslim divine or a more attractive offer for one coveting positions of power. But the Maulana respectfully declined. The divines—even the most orthodox ones of Deoband and Lucknow—pressed him to accept the honour, knowing that he held radical views. But soon he was arrested,

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as we shall see in the next chapter. On release in 1923 he was again pressed, but he explained to the executive committee of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema that the appointment of anyone, however exalted, as the spiritual head was fraught with danger and might prove an obstacle in the progress of the Muslim community, and therefore he begged them not to press him. It was a great piece of renunciation and established his reputation with the divines more firmly than ever before.

## VIII

### A DECLARATION OF FAITH

The closing weeks of the year 1921 were full of feverish activity for Government. During the whole year there had been sufficient defiance of law and authority, and this reached its climax when the Ali brothers with a few others were arrested for sedition and tampering with the loyalty of the sepoys. The arrest of one of the brothers, Maulana Mahomed Ali, took place while he was touring with Gandhiji and as both were actually going to address a public meeting. Gandhiji did not then know why Maulana Mahomed Ali was arrested. But his immediate protest rang throughout the country: "In imprisoning Maulana Mahomed Ali, the Government have imprisoned the Khilafat, for the two brothers are the truest representatives of the Khilafat. . . . Let us imitate the courage, the faith, the fearlessness, the truthfulness and the vigilant incessant activity of the brothers." In a day or two came the communiqué issued by the Governor of Bombay stating the reasons why Maulana Mahomed Ali, his brother and five others had been arrested. They were to be prosecuted for having been responsible at a Karachi conference for having passed a resolution which amounted to tam-

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pering with the loyalty of the sepoy, and the Governor declared that Government were no longer going to put up with such a thing and meant business. This was a signal for another challenge from the public. Gandhiji expressed the challenge in words that could not be mistaken. The Governor of Bombay, he declared, "evidently does not know that the National Congress began to tamper with the loyalty of the sepoy in September last year, that the central Khilafat Committee began it earlier, and that I began it earlier still, for I must be permitted to take the credit or the odium of suggesting that India had a right openly to tell the sepoy and everyone who served the Government in any capacity whatsoever that he participated in the wrongs done by the Government. The Conference at Karachi merely repeated the Congress declaration in terms of Islam. . . . How can anyone having a spark of humanity in him and any Mussalman having any pride in his religion feel otherwise than the Ali brothers have done? . . . His Excellency's reference to the sedition of the Ali brothers is only less unpardonable than his reference to the tampering. For he must know that sedition has become the creed of the Congress. Every non-co-operator is pledged to preach disaffection towards the Government established by law." This declaration resulted in a manifesto, signed by all the important leaders in the country, defying Government to do their worst. It declared: "We, the undersigned,

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speaking in our individual capacity, desire to state that it is the inherent right of everyone to express his opinion without restraint about the propriety of citizens offering their services to, or remaining in the employ of, the Government, whether in the civil or the military department. We, the undersigned, state it as our opinion that it is contrary to national dignity for any Indian to serve as a civilian, and more especially as a soldier, under a system of government which has brought about India's economic, moral and political degradation and which has used the soldiery and the police for repressing national aspirations, as for instance at the time of the Rowlatt Act agitation, and which has used the soldiers for crushing the liberty of the Arabs, the Egyptians, the Turks and other nations who have done no harm to India. We are also of opinion that it is the duty of every Indian soldier and civilian to sever his connection with the Government and find some other means of livelihood." The very second signature to this manifesto, after Gandhiji's, was Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's. This was followed by a repetition of this manifesto by hundreds of persons from countless platforms. But, strange to say, no action was taken by Government on this. I have an impression that Government were stunned and quite unprepared for this country-wide conflagration.

But soon after came the Prince of Wales's visit, and the Congress decision to boycott all functions in con-

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nection therewith. There was no insult intended to the Prince as a man, but there was a resolute decision to boycott the visit, as it was obviously being exploited for advertising the "benign" British rule in India. There was no meaning in spending millions of rupees on receiving the Prince of Wales and in arranging for a pleasure trip and sport for him, when the country was seething with discontent and when millions were in a chronic state of starvation. It was an outrage and a crime, and the Congress proclaimed a boycott to be carried out in as thorough a manner as possible. For this purpose volunteers began to be enrolled in every province. The Government answered by issuing notifications in Bengal, the Punjab and the United Provinces declaring these volunteer organizations illegal and enlisting of volunteers an offence. This challenge was taken up everywhere by open defiance of the notification. Not only were volunteers enlisted, but their names were published in newspapers from day to day. The names of Pandits Motilal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru were at the head of the list in the United Provinces, and those of Deshabandhu C. R. Das and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad at that of the list in Bengal. The Deshabandhu made a clarion call to his countrymen: "I feel the handcuffs on my wrists and the weight of iron chains on my body. It is the agony of bondage. The whole of India is a vast prison.\*The work of the Congress must be carried on. What matters



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it whether I am taken or left? What matters it whether I am dead or alive?" The whole country was, as it were, electrified, and though Bombay disgraced itself by ugly disturbances the other cities carried out a peaceful boycott. Allahabad and Calcutta presented a sepulchral appearance, and wherever the Prince went there were none but a handful of Government employees to greet him.

An orgy of arrests followed everywhere. The highest in the land were arrested and sent to prison. The Nehrus in the United Provinces, Lala Lajpatrai in the Punjab, Deshabandhu Das and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in Calcutta, and thousands of the rank and file proudly found themselves behind prison bars. Between December and January not less than thirty thousand people were arrested and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. Their refusal to defend themselves and their ringing statements in courts made a mockery of British Indian courts and of British justice.

Deshabandhu Das was to have presided over that year's session of the Congress, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad over the session of the Muslim League. Both were prisoners before they could go to discharge their duties as presidents. Their joy knew no bounds. Mrs. Das wrote a long letter to Gandhiji expressing her joy over her husband's arrest, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad left before going to prison a letter to Gandhiji in which he said: "You are every day running

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short of human aid as your colleagues are being everywhere arrested, but divine aid is on the other hand increasing. The recent disturbances in Bombay had caused you great pain, and I felt much aggrieved to see you so unhappy and restless on that account. But Calcutta is now aroused in order to present to you the pleasant fruits of success in place of your sorrowful feelings of the past." The trial of both Deshabandhu C. R. Das and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was, on some pretext or other, allowed to drag on for over three months. The Maulana was awarded a year's imprisonment, and he regretted that he had been let off with such a light sentence. But before his conviction he made before the court a statement which was unique among all the statements made by Satyagrahi prisoners. It was naturally in the Maulana's polished Urdu, and the English translation, which could not really bring out the beauty of the original, covered over thirty closely typed foolscap sheets. Gandhiji hailed it "as an eloquent thesis giving the Maulana's views on Khilafat and Nationalism," and "an oration deserving penal servitude for life." He also said that it constituted good political education. Though the Maulana has had no English education at school or college, as we have seen before, he had educated himself at home. The statement reveals the wealth of his historical knowledge, his incisive argument, and his determination to suffer for the motherland. Twenty years have not staled the

freshness of this utterance, and a few extracts from it will not be out of place.

Here is a passage in which he proudly claims to belong to the long line of Satyagrahis from Jesus and Socrates downwards who suffered for adherence to truth:

"The iniquities of courts of law constitute an endless list and history has not yet finished singing the elegy of such miscarriages of justice. In that list we observe a holy personage like Jesus, who had to stand in his time before a foreign court and be convicted even as the worst of criminals. We see also in the same list Socrates, who was sentenced to be poisoned for no other crime than that of being the most truthful person of his age. We meet also the name of that great Florentine martyr to truth, the inventor Galileo, who refused to belie his observations and researches merely because their avowal was a crime in the eyes of constituted authority. . . . When I ponder on the great and significant history of the convicts' dock and find that the honour of standing in that place belongs to me to-day, my soul becomes steeped in thankfulness and praise of God."

Then he defines dispassionately the duty of breeding holy discontent:

"The bureaucracy in India is nothing more nor less than the domination which powerful individuals will always normally attain over a nation decaying by its own neglect and internal weaknesses. In the natural

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course of things such dominant authority cannot possibly countenance any nationalistic awakening or agitations for progress, reform or justice. And as such agitation would spell the inevitable downfall of its dominant power, it seeks to kill all agitation by declaring it a crime against constituted authority. No power would tamely submit to movements likely to bring about its own decline, however much such decline might be in the ultimate interests of justice. This posture of affairs is merely a struggle for existence in which both sides fight desperately for their principles. An awakened nation aspires to attain what it considers its birth-right, and the dominant authority would fain not budge an inch from its position of unquestioned way. The contention might be advanced that the latter party even like its opponents is not open to any blame inasmuch as it is merely putting up a fight for its own survival, and it is quite an incidental matter that its existence happens to be inimical to perpetuation of justice. We cannot deny facts of human nature and its inseparable characteristics. Like good, evil also desires to live in this world and struggle for its own existence. In India also such a struggle for the survival of the fittest has already commenced. Most certainly, therefore, nothing can be a higher crime against the domination of Government, as at present established, than the agitation which seeks to terminate its unlimited authority in the name of liberty and justice. I fully

admit that I am not only guilty of such agitation, but that I belong to that band of pioneers who originally sowed the seed of such agitation in the heart of our nation and dedicated their whole lives to the cherishing and breeding of this holy discontent."

Next he describes the evil of domination over a nation by a foreign Power:

"It is my belief that liberty is the natural and God-given right of man. No man and no bureaucracy consisting of men has got the right to make the servants of God its own slaves. However attractive be the euphemisms invented for 'subjugation' and 'slavery,' still slavery is slavery, and it is opposed to the will and the canons of God. I therefore consider it a bounden duty to liberate my country from its yoke. The notorious fallacies of 'reform' and 'gradual transference of power' can produce no illusions and pitfalls in my unequivocal and definite faith. Liberty being the primary right of man, it is nobody's personal privilege to prescribe limits or apportion shares in the distribution of it. To say that a nation should get its liberty in graduated stages is the same as saying that an owner should by right receive his property only in bits and creditor his dues by instalments. . . . Whatever philanthropic acts might be performed by a man who has usurped our property, his usurpation would still continue to be utterly illegal.

"Evil cannot be classified into good and bad. All

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that is in fairness possible is to differentiate the varying degree. For instance, we can say very heinous robbery and less heinous robbery, but who can speak of good robbery and bad robbery? I cannot, therefore, at all conceive of any justification for such domination because by its very nature it is an act of iniquity."

Then follows the meaning of the Khilafat and a declaration of the duty of all Muslims:

"Such is my duty as a man and as an Indian, and religious injunctions have imposed upon me the same duty. In fact, in my view the greatest proof of the truth of my religion is that it is another name for the teaching of the rights of man. I am a Mussalman, and by virtue of being a Mussalman this has become my religious duty. Islam never accepts as valid a sovereignty which is personal or is constituted of a bureaucracy of a handful of paid executives. Islam constitutes a perfected system of freedom and democracy. It has been sent down to get back for the human race the liberty which has been snatched away from it. Monarchs, foreign dominations, selfish religious pontiffs and powerful sections had alike misappropriated this liberty of man. They had been fondly nursing the belief that power and possession spell the highest right. The moment Islam appeared, it proclaimed that the highest right is not might but right itself. No one except God has got the right to make serfs and slaves of God's creatures. All men are equal and their fundamental rights are on

a par. He only is greater than others whose deeds are the most righteous of all. . . .

"The sovereignty of the Prophet of Islam and of the Khalif was a perfected conception of democratic equality, and it only could take shape with the whole nation's free will, unity, suffrage and election. This is the reason why the sovereign or president of a republic is like a designated Khalif; Khilafat literally means nothing more nor less than a representation, so that all the authority a Khalif possesses consists in his representative character, and he possesses no domination beyond this representative authority.

"If then Islam defines it as a duty of Mahomedans to refuse to acknowledge the moral justification even of an Islamic Government, if full play is not granted in it to the will and franchise of the nation, it is perfectly superfluous to add what under Islam would be the ruling given about a foreign bureaucracy. If to-day there was to be established in India an Islamic Government, but if the system of that Government was based upon personal monarchy or upon bureaucratic oligarchy, then to protest against the existence of such a Government would still be my primary duty as a Mussalman. I would still call the Government oppressive and demand its replacement.

"I frankly confess that this original conception of Islamic sovereignty could not be uniformly maintained in its primal purity on account of the selfishness

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and personal domineering of the later Mahomedan sovereigns. The mighty magnificence of the Emperors of Ancient Rome and of the Shahs of Persia had attracted the Muslim sovereigns powerfully to the dubious glory of great monarchical empires. They began to prefer the majestic figures of Kaiser or Khosroe to the simple dignity of the original Khalifs clad oftentimes in old tattered cloaks. No period of the dynasties and sovereignties of Islam has however failed to produce some true Muslim martyrs, who have made public declarations of the tyrannies and transgressions of such monarchies and joyfully and triumphantly suffered all miseries and hardships which inevitably confronted them in the thorny paths of duty.

“The holy Prophet of Islam has preached the following doctrine to the Muslims: ‘That man is blessed with the best of deaths who proclaims the truth in the face of a tyrannical administration and is slaughtered in punishment of this deed.’ The Scripture of Islam, the Holy Qurân, defines the greatest attribute of the true Muslim to be ‘that they fear not any being except God and whatever they consider to be the truth, they reckon not any authority in the public proclamation of such truth.’ The Qurân further defines the national characteristics of the Muslims as follows: ‘They are the witnesses to truth on God’s earth.’ As long therefore as they continue to be Muslims they cannot desist from giving this public evidence. In fact it has desig-



nated Muslims as witnesses, i.e. givers of the evidence of truth. When the Prophet of Islam extracted a promise of righteousness from any person, one of the clauses of such a bond used to be, 'I will always proclaim the truth in whatever condition and wherever I may happen to be . . .'

"An outstanding object-lesson in speaking the truth which their national history presents to the Muslims is to be found in the order of an autocratic monarch by which each organ of a rebellious victim's body was to be cut off. The charge against the victim was that he had proclaimed the inequity of the tyrant. Firm as a rock he stood and took his punishment in all its heinous stages, but his tongue right on to the moment when it was severed went on proclaiming that that autocrat was a tyrant. This is an incident of the reign of the Emperor Abdul Malik, whose domain extended from Syria to Sind. Can anyone then attach any weight to a sentence under Section 124A as compared to this terrible penalty? I confess that it is the moral decadence of Muslims and their renouncing the real Islamic life that is responsible for the bringing about of this fallen state.

"While I am penning these lines I know there is still living in India many a Muslim who through his weakness pays homage to this very tyranny. But the failure of man to act up to the spirit of certain tenets cannot belie the intrinsic truth of those principles.

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"The tenets of Islam are preserved in its scriptures. These, under no circumstances, make it permissible for Muslims to enjoy life at the expense of liberty. A true Muslim has either to immolate himself or to retain his liberty; no other course is open for him under his religion. To-day the Muslims have come to a firm decision that in freeing their country from its slavery they will take their fullest share along with their Hindu, Sikh, Parsi and Christian brethren.

"Continuously in the last twelve years I have been training my community and my country in demanding their rights and their liberty. I was only eighteen years old when I first started speaking and writing on this theme. I have consecrated my whole being to it and sacrificed the best part of my life, meaning the whole of my youth, to my infatuation for this ideal. For four years I have suffered internment, but during my internment even I have never desisted from pushing on my work and inviting people to this national goal. This is the mission of my life, and if I live at all I elect to live only for this single purpose. Even as the Qurân says, 'My prayers and my observances and my life and my death are all for my Lord, the God of the Universe.' I am the first pioneer in this latest phase of that Islamic movement in India which has created a tremendous revolution in the political world of the Indian Muslims and has gradually elevated them to that pinnacle of national consciousness on which they are

seen to-day. In 1912 I started an Urdu journal, the *Al Hilal*, which was the organ of this movement and the object of the publication of which was mainly what I have declared above. It is an actual fact that within those three years it had created a new atmosphere in the religious and the political life of the Mussalmans of India . . .

"In this war of liberty and justice I have adopted the path of non-violent non-co-operation. Opposed to us stands an authority armed with the complete equipment for oppression, excess and bloodshed. But we place our reliance and trust, next to God, only upon our own limitless power of sacrifice and unshakable fortitude.

"Unlike Mahatma Gandhi my belief is not that armed force should never be opposed by armed force. It is my belief that such opposing of violence with violence is fully in harmony with the natural laws of God in those circumstances under which Islam permits the use of such violence. But at the same time, for purposes of liberation of India and the present agitation, I entirely agree with all the arguments of Mahatma Gandhi and I have complete confidence in his honesty. It is my definite conviction that India cannot attain success by means of arms, nor is it advisable for it to adopt that course. India can only triumph through non-violent agitation, and India's triumph will be a memorable example of the victory of moral force."

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The Maulana's thoughts so clearly expressed in this statement regarding the democratic conception in Islam are of special note and worthy of being contrasted with the statements of some of the present leaders of Muslims who say that democracy is unsuited to the genius of Islam. The Maulana declares that "Islam defines it as a duty of Mahomedans to refuse to acknowledge the moral justification even of an Islamic Government, if full play is not granted in it to the will and franchise of the nation." And the statement proclaims also that dedication to the service of the motherland, which was made at the age of eighteen and is still in process of fulfilment.

## IX

### THE TURN OF THE TIDE

Those indeed were glorious days. Hindus and Muslims had realized that on the sacred field of Jallianwalla, where the blood of the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs had mingled to unite them as blood brothers and to baptize them as soldiers of Swaraj, they had been blessed by God by a new message of hope and union. And so when Gandhiji covered the length and breadth of the land, now in company with the Ali brothers, now in company with Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, now with some other Muslim leaders, the apathy of the Muslim masses towards politics and political work had vanished; they vied with one another in little acts of service and sacrifice and in wonderful and effusive demonstrations of fraternization. Orthodox Hindus, whose dining-rooms had never been opened before to any but their own kith and kin, accepted with open arms revered Muslim leaders, and they were invited to dine side by side with the Hindu leaders in their own homes. Muslim purdah ladies, who would not go to a public meeting and would certainly never entertain the thought of having a leader of the opposite sex to address them, now met in huge meetings and invited

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Gandhiji to address them. Quite an unforgettable spectacle of those days was Maulana Shaukat Ali and Maulana Mahomed Ali and other Muslim leaders going to these normally prohibited meetings with bandages on their eyes. Gandhiji, they said, was pure enough to go anywhere and everywhere. To him all women were as sisters or daughters, and even Muslim ladies would not hesitate to have him in their midst. But the position of others, including their own, was different. They were ordinary erring mortals, and so they should go to these sisters with eyes blindfolded! The climax was reached when Muslims everywhere in India refrained not only from eating beef but even from sacrificing cows on the sacred day of Id. "It is our sacred duty to help our Muslim brethren to protect the cow of their Khilafat, without thought of bargain or reward," Gandhiji had declared at public meetings and in many of his writings. "Our cow will be protected automatically. The Muslims may be expected to think of their own duty in the matter." And not only his words went straight home, but leaders were not wanting who not only personally refrained from using beef or sacrificing the cow, but even went out of their way to protect cows in many instances where through ignorance they would have been slaughtered.

Political awakening had reached its high-water mark. The test came when a Round Table Conference met

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at the instance of Lord Reading to consider proposals of a compromise between the Government and the Congress. The only stumbling-block was the insistence on the release of the Ali brothers and other "Khilafat" prisoners. The conference had really been offered with a view to tiding over the crisis arising out of the Congress boycott of the visit of the Prince of Wales, and even if all our terms had been accepted there was not much chance of achieving solid results. But Gandhiji and other Hindu leaders were adamant in their demand for the release of the Khilafat prisoners without whom, they said, no compromise proposals would be worth discussing. The result was that Deshabandhu Das and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and the thousands of others who went with them to prison had to remain there to serve their full terms of imprisonment.

But with the incarceration of Gandhiji, and the lull in the movement that came not necessarily as a result of but certainly after the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement, demoralization set in. The appeal for constructive work fell on deaf ears. The political leaders were all in jail, and communal leaders who had during the raging campaign stayed aloof now came to the surface. The Government, always ready to make the best of our weaknesses, used some of these as their tools. The policy of "Divide and Rule" that had received a rude shock during the years 1919-22 again

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came to the fore, and interested parties played on the narrow prejudices of the ignorant. But it was no use blaming the Government. "Divide and Rule," Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru has said, "has always been the way of empires, and the measure of their success in this policy has been also the measure of their superiority over those whom they thus exploit. We cannot complain of this, or at any rate we ought not to be surprised at it. To ignore it and not to provide against it is in itself a mistake in one's thought."

However that may be, the years that followed Gandhiji's incarceration in 1922 saw the success of this policy and events proved that the unity we seemed to have achieved had been anything but substantial. It was certainly not heart unity. The Hindus' attempt to prevent cow sacrifice by force was sufficient to lead to a riot and considerable bloodshed. Their playing music whilst passing in processions in front of a mosque became an occasion for a conflict. And there are mosques in all parts of every town and city, daily prayers go on at five times during the twenty-four hours, and there are also the inevitable noises due to processions and the like. A wholesome spirit of give-and-take, of accommodation and tolerance is all that is needed for preventing these clashes. But something had conspired to root out from the mass mind that spirit of brotherliness that seemed to have been fostered during 1919-22. The superficial faith in non-violence



was extinguished, and no solution seemed to appeal to them save a resort to force.

In some provinces the cause was economic. A minister insisting on packing his departments with his co-religionists gave rise to distrust and fear in the mind of the other community, and this naturally increased the existing tension. Indigent Muslim tenants and debtors listened to instigation against Hindu landlords and moneylenders, and a purely economic question became in many places a communal one.

Religious fanatics in each community attacked the other's religion and sought to add to its fold men and women from the other community without the slightest regard to the means employed. The Mussalmans proclaimed their right to carry on *tabligh*; the Hindus replied by proclaiming their right to *shuddhi*. These attempts at conversions brought conflict after conflict in their train, and there were fierce riots. Newspapers and pamphlets became the vehicles of scurrilous propaganda and in not a few cases were the cause of the riots.

This was the atmosphere prepared for the reception of Gandhiji when he was released from prison in January 1924. Hardly a fortnight passed without the news of a riot somewhere. At Multan, Saharanpur, Agra, Ajmer, Palwal and at many another place there were fierce riots with incendiarism, looting and destruction of property and desecration of sacred places.

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Some Hindus laid the blame for all this at Gandhiji's door: "You asked the Hindus to make common cause with Mussalmans on the Khilafat question. That resulted in unifying and awakening the Mussalmans, and now that the Khilafat is over the awakened Mussalmans have proclaimed a kind of *Jehad* [holy war] against us Hindus." The Mussalmans said: "We simple-minded people have been unjustly treated. You by your agitation won over Mahomed Ali to your side and you attacked the famous institution at Aligarh built with patient care by Sir Syed Ahmed. Your boycott of councils prevented our able men from going to the councils to the prejudice of the interests of our community." In an historic article on Hindu-Muslim tension Gandhiji analysed the causes and suggested the solution, and declared that he was entirely unrepentant for what he had done. "Had I been a prophet and foreseen all that has happened, I should still have thrown myself into the Khilafat agitation," he said. "The awakening among the masses was a necessary part of the training. It is a tremendous gain. I would do nothing to put the people to sleep again." But his article was the occasion of a number of questions and cross-questions, and apparently no one seemed to have profited by it. For within a short while desecration of Hindu temples by Mussalmans at Amethi, Sambhal and Gulbarga took place followed by fierce riots, and on the top of this came the terrible

riots at Kohat with wanton destruction of lakhs of rupees' worth of property.

Gandhiji was exasperated. To use his words he was "violently shaken" by the rioting at Amethi, Sambhal and Gulbarga, and "the news from Kohat set the smouldering mass aflame. Something had got to be done. I passed two nights in restlessness and pain." On Wednesday, September 18, 1924, he knew the remedy. "I must do penance," he declared. "My penance is the prayer of a bleeding heart for forgiveness for sins unwittingly committed. To revile one another's religion, to make reckless statements, to utter untruths, to break the heads of innocent men, to desecrate temples or mosques, is a denial of God." And he imposed on himself a fast of twenty-one days.

The step sent a thrill of anxiety throughout the country. Friends from all parts of the country flocked to Delhi, where the fast was undertaken, and Pandit Motilal Nehru presided over a "Unity Conference" to consider the whole question and suggest a solution to be placed before the country. Over a hundred and fifty leaders, Hindus and Mussalmans, met and sat for several days, and passed several resolutions. But the conference was far from being an expression of the true repentance that Gandhiji had asked for, and it looked as though it would have to break up without any tangible result. "Neither party seemed to be able,"

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said the Metropolitan Bishop of Calcutta, who attended the conference by invitation, and who should be regarded as a detached observer, "to trust the professions of goodwill made by the other, and generous advances were treated as a bait to secure some more substantial advantage." There were terms and counter-terms proposed by opposing groups, who seemed to have met together to strike a bargain rather than achieve heart-unity.

But among the men who endeavoured to the utmost to infuse a spirit of seriousness and even of contrition for man having turned beast and denied religion, one of the foremost, if not the foremost, was Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. He came to the conference resolved, he said, "to allow no palliation in respect to what he had come to regard as the undeniable excesses or unreasonable demands of any party for the sake of expediency and to observe no reserve in declaring the truth, however bitter and heartrending it might prove to be for anyone." It may be said that without Maulana Abul Kalam Azad the second and the most important resolution might not have been passed. That resolution read as follows: "This Conference declares that it is not only wrong against law but also against religion for anyone to take the law into his own hands, either for the purpose of retaliation or punishment, and therefore declares that all points in dispute shall be decided by reference either to private arbitration,

or where that is impossible, by reference to a court of law."

But an even more difficult question was that of the cow. The resolution as drafted provided that "Hindus must not expect the exercise of the right of cow-killing to be stopped by force [whether physical or legislative] but only by mutual consent." The Hindus then said: "If we Hindus give away so much, you Muslims must agree to a further clause guaranteeing that no cows will be killed in any place, where they are not killed now, and that you will gradually reduce all cow-killing, until the practice is completely stopped." That was a difficult thing for the Mussalmans to accept, especially the last clause. But the Maulana again came to the rescue. His moving eloquence which proceeded out of a heart overflowing with contrition and generosity won the day. As a Hindu leader who was attending the conference wrote: "He is known to be one of the best speakers in the country. He enjoys the further advantage of being a great scholar and theologian in his own community. On the present occasion he surpassed himself in the pathos and fervour of his eloquence and the generosity of his sentiment, prompted (as he himself pointed out) by the special circumstances of India consistently with the strict observance of the practice of his own faith. The appeal which he made to both communities was the turning-point of the discussion. He asked his co-religionists to remember

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that cow-slaughter even for purposes of sacrifice was not a fundamental part of their religion, and he assured his Hindu friends that there were not a few Mussalman leaders who had not only never tasted beef themselves, but were endeavouring to reduce the use of it among Mussalmans, if only to show their spirit of brotherliness with the Hindus." That moved the Mussalmans, but they were not prepared to accept the final clause. It seemed to be a matter of touch and go. The President adjourned the meeting and appealed both to the Hindus and Muslims to hold consultations again and make up their minds as to what was possible. The prospect appeared gloomy for a time, until at last the Maulana's appeal touched a responsive chord in Pandit Malaviyaji's heart. He got up and in a tense atmosphere announced that the Hindus did not mind the words about complete stoppage of cow-slaughter being deleted. The whole conference was for the first time swept by a wave of enthusiasm and made the rest of the work absolutely easy. The earlier drafts of resolutions had taken largely the form of rights; now a realization came that there were no rights without responsibilities, and that the solution of the trouble lay in each being ready to fulfil one's obligations rather than to assert one's rights.

After the termination of Gandhiji's fast the Muslim leaders gathered round Gandhiji's bed. He spoke to them in a feeble voice but with deep emotion: "I do

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not know what is the will of God, but on this day I would beseech you to promise to lay down your lives if necessary for the cause [Hindu-Muslim unity].” Hakim Ajmal Khan and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad renewed the solemn pledge. The Hakim Saheb is alas no more, nor is there now amidst us that man of God, Deenabandhu C. F. Andrews, who was present to record this solemn pledge. But the Maulana, thank God, is still with us. Both the Hakimji and the Deenabandhu were among his closest friends, and he knows that he owes it as much to them as to Gandhiji to carry out the pledge.

But the fulfilment of the task lies, as Gandhiji said, in God’s hands. What will not be forgotten is the noble part played by the Maulana in the Unity Conference that the fast had occasioned. I was talking to the good Metropolitan the other day about the Maulana’s work, and he has written to me a letter which I am happy to reproduce here:

“I look back to the peace conference in the autumn of 1924 as one of the most important incidents of my life, and among the many Hindu and Mahomedan leaders whom I met on that occasion there are three or four who stand out in my memory by reason of the eloquence with which they advocated a spirit of reason and toleration which ultimately found concrete expression in the resolutions which were adopted. At the commencement of the meeting of the Subjects

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Committee there was a general tendency for the spokesmen of the rival communities to insist on their rights regardless of the effect of such action on others who held diverse views. Gradually it was recognized that, while freedom of thought and conviction is legitimate, its expression must take into due consideration the recognition of the equal rights of others to a similar expression of their conviction. Among the spokesmen of the Mahomedan side who exercised an outstanding influence was Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. I listened with admiration to the clearness with which he made his several points without undue repetition and in conciliatory language. He spoke in Urdu, and one could see the effect which his clear reasoning had upon his audience. Sixteen years have not dimmed the impression which his eloquence and fair-mindedness made upon me. The fact of his election to the Presidentship of the Congress is further testimony of the quality which he possesses, and I hope that he may be able to draw together rival communities who at the present time seem to be drifting further apart."

But neither the fast nor the resolutions of the Unity Conference solved the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity. The conference was attended by most of the prominent leaders, but they had not come as representatives of their communities, and none had the strength to get the warring groups to listen to them or act upon the resolutions. Almost immediately after the



fast riots broke out in Jubbulpore and Allahabad. In 1925 the sad tale was repeated at various places in the country; so much so that in May of that year Gandhiji, in sheer exasperation and almost in desperation, had to declare at a public meeting:

“I have admitted my incompetence. I have admitted that I have been found wanting as a physician prescribing a cure for this malady. I do not find that either Hindus or Muslims are ready to accept my cure, and therefore I simply nowadays confine myself to a passing mention of this problem and content myself by saying that some day or other we Hindus and Muslims will have to come together, if we want the deliverance of our country. And if it is to be our lot that, before we can come together, we must shed one another's blood, then I say the sooner we do so the better it is for us. If we propose to break one another's heads, let us do so in a manly way.” The situation, even fifteen years since that pathetic declaration, is just the same, perhaps worse. But among those who hold steadfastly to the will to unite whatever happens—and that is what will ultimately count—the name of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad stands in the forefront.

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In considering the Maulana's attitude to religion and views on religious matters there are one or two things that must be borne in mind. The principal thing is that though he comes of a long line of ancestors who were theologians and must have been formalists, he had emancipated his mind from all the effects of the old theological tradition and an orthodox education, and, as we saw at the end of the fourth chapter, he had formulated his own critical method of approach to the various problems. To understand his approach thoroughly it is necessary to understand the methods of the various theological schools which flourished among the Muslims, the method of reasoning adopted by various commentators, the scholasticism that flourishes to-day and the different schools of Islamic rationalism. The Maulana has promulgated a new *Ilm-e-Kalam*—a new method of rational interpretation of Islamic teaching. It is impossible for me to go into any detailed study of this, and perhaps the Western reader does not need this. A few broad facts may be noted here.

He brought a strictly rational and logical attitude of mind to bear on all questions and refused to take

anything for granted, or any interpretation as sacrosanct because it had the stamp of antiquity about it or the authority of big names behind it. He is not one of those who strive to prove that as there is nothing new under the sun, even so all the modern scientific discoveries are to be found in the scriptures. He has a distinctly scientific and historical outlook, and he examines every text not only in its immediate context and environment but in the setting and in relation to the running purpose of the whole book in which it occurs. Above all he differentiates what he calls the vital roots of religion from its innumerable branches and leaves. When these things are borne in mind, it will not be difficult to understand his interpretation of Islam and his attitude to other religions.

The most authoritative source-book for the purpose is his monumental *Tarjumanul Qurân*—Translation and Commentary on the Qurân—which is prefaced with an exhaustive introduction explaining his way of approach. A little bit of history of this translation and commentary will not be out of place. Two of the three parts of the book had been done by him during his four years' internment in Ranchi, and he was engaged on the third part when suddenly one day the Deputy Commissioner came and carried out one of his usual elaborate "searches," seized all the manuscripts he found and sent them on to the Government of India. These were not returned to him even after his release

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from internment until he approached the Government of India, through the late Lord Sinha, with the result that he was asked to approach the Bihar Government, who had been instructed to return them. He approached the Government of Bihar, who indeed returned the manuscripts but in a disordered and half-burnt condition. He was told that there had been a fire, and he was asked to thank his stars that at least part of them had been rescued! The Government did not know the destruction they had wrought, any more than J. S. Mill's servant knew what he had done when he had burnt Carlyle's manuscript of the first volume of the *French Revolution*. But even as Carlyle rewrote the whole volume, the Maulana rewrote the whole of the translation and the commentary!

The Maulana's commentary is held in high esteem even by those who do not see eye to eye with him in matters social and political, because the Maulana's profound learning and deeply critical scholarship are undisputed not only among Muslim scholars and divines in India but in other Islamic lands.

But to turn to the work itself. He starts with the first fundamental proposition, viz. that the roots—or rather the root—of all religions is one, that every race and country and age had its own teacher and prophet, and the cardinal principles that they taught were the same. "The Qurân says," to quote the Maulana, "no matter what the country and what the age, all the

prophets sent by God taught the same universal truth for the welfare of mankind, viz. Faith and Good Works, i.e. Worship of one God and Right Conduct. Anything that is said in contravention of this is not true religion: 'Certainly,' says the Qurân (6.18), 'I have sent for every people in the world a prophet [who taught] them to worship one God and never to be carried away by passions.' Also: 'Never did I send before you a prophet but with the command that I am the only God to be worshipped and no other.' The Qurân also says that God created all men as human beings, but they adopted varying names and labels and broke the unity of mankind to pieces. As you were born of various stocks, you bore different names and were divided from one another. You were born in different countries, and therefore people of one country are fighting those of another. You belong to different races, and therefore you war with one another. You were born with different colours, and so there have been colour-wars springing from mutual hate. Language again became one more cause of division. There are countless other divisions—rich and poor, master and servant, high-born and low-born, strong and weak, and so on. All these divisions cannot but make for discord and strife. What then is the silken string that can thread these scattered beads and make of divided mankind one united brotherhood? That silken string, that sacred link, is the Worship of One God. How-much-so-ever divided

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you may be, you cannot have different Gods. You are the servants of One Lord, and your prayers and worship are before the One Sacred Throne. No matter what your race, tribe or country, the moment you surrender yourselves to one Father, He will put an end to all your earthly quarrels and unite your hearts together. You will then realize that the world is your country and mankind is one family and you are children of the same father."

Also:

"The Qurân challenges anyone to prove that other inspired books or religions or other seers or prophets taught anything different from the eternal Truth taught in the Qurân: 'If you deny the Truth [of my teaching] support your denial by any book published before this, or any wisdom or truth that you may have had handed down to you' (46.3). The Qurân thus declares that the eternal truths of all religions support one another. And if that is so, it is proved that at the back of them all is one Eternal Truth."

Next comes the declaration about the kernel and the shell of religion, the root and the branches of religion. "The Qurân says that all religious teaching consists of two parts—one giving the eternal principles, i.e. the source of religion, and the other outside form or trappings. One is the principal thing, the other is subordinate. The first is called the Faith by the Qurân, the second is called the Rules of Conduct. This second

thing is called *sharaa*, or *musuk* or *minhaj*. The first two terms mean roads, the third term means the ritual of worship. The Qurân says that religions of the world differ not in the principal thing, viz. the eternal truths, but in the rules of conduct, ways of worship; they differ not in the roots, but in leaves and branches, not in the spirit but in the outward form or body. This difference was inevitable. The object of Religion is the well-being of mankind, but the conditions of mankind vary with the age and country. One country or age required a particular kind and mode of living, another required a different kind. Every religion in its outward form therefore reflected the spirit of the age and country in which it was taught, and it suited that age and country. 'Oh Prophet!' says the Qurân, 'I have prescribed a particular form of worship for every group of people, which it observes. Men should not therefore quarrel about these forms' (22.67). The Qurân goes further and declares wherein lies the essence of religion and how man can achieve his welfare. The Qurân declares that religion does not consist in the direction facing which a man offers prayers, whether it should be the East or the West. The essence of religion lies in the worship of One God and Right Conduct. And then the Qurân proceeds to define these:

It is not righteousness  
That ye turn your faces  
Towards East or West;

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But it is righteousness—  
To believe in God  
And the Last Day,  
And the Angels,  
*And the Book,*  
And the Messengers.  
To Spend your substance  
Out of love for Him,  
For your kin,  
For orphans,  
For the needy,  
For the Wayfarer,  
For those who ask,  
And for the ransom of slaves;  
To be steadfast in prayer,  
And practise regular charity;  
*To fulfil the contracts*  
*Which ye have made,*  
And to be firm and patient,  
In pain (or suffering)  
And adversity,  
And throughout  
All periods of panic.  
Such are the people  
Of Truth, the God-fearing. (2.177.)”

I have here made use of Mr. A. Yusuf Ali's rhythmic translation, which is the latest in the field. Maulana's own translation has “books” instead of “book” and “keep your vow or pledge” instead of “fulfil the contracts ye have made.”

One may compare with this great text of the Qurân



the last nineteen verses of the second discourse of the Bhagwad Gita or the attributes of the Devotee given in the twelfth discourse, or the six Beatitudes, in order to see the point of the Maulana's commentary, given above, on this Qurânic text.

"And then," proceeds the Maulana, "look at this great text (I want you not to read it cursorily but to mark and read every word carefully): 'To each among you (i.e. for the followers of every religion) I have prescribed a particular law and a way. If God had so willed, He would have made you alike (i.e. there would have been no difference of ritual or ceremonial). But He made you different to test you in [the observance of] the commands He has given you: So strive, as in a race, in virtuous conduct (not in emphasizing these differences)' (5.48). When the Qurân was given the followers of various religions were engaged in emphasizing the external forms of religion and mistaking them for the essence of religion. Everyone thought that the adherents of religions other than his had no salvation before him, for their ceremonials and rituals were not the same as his own. The Qurân declares that this is a denial of religion. The essence of religion is the Worship of One God and Right Conduct. This cannot be the exclusive patrimony of an individual or a people. . . . Ceremonials and rituals will vary and will continue to vary with the age and the country. . . . The text goes further and says that God in His omniscience

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deliberately created this diversity. The text declares that different rules and ways were prescribed for different people; it does not say that *different religions* were prescribed for different people. For Religion for all is one; there cannot be more than one or different religions. The Qurân declares that human nature is so constituted that these outward forms will differ, and everyone thinks that his way is superior to that of others, he cannot look at his own way from the point of view of his opponents. But even as your way is excellent in your own eye, even so in other people's eyes their way is excellent. Toleration therefore is the only way."

I come now to the three verses of the Qurân which, according to the Maulana, sum up all that the Qurân has to say, sum up indeed all that numerous tomes have been written to say. Those are verses 92, 93, 94 of Sura 21:

92. (The teaching we gave through all these prophets was this) "Of yours verily is a single brotherhood of people (there are no separate religions and no separate groups); and I am the single Lord and cherisher of you all; therefore worship Me only" (and do not be separate in this).

93. "But people created divisions among themselves, cut their one Religion into little bits. In the end all have to return to Us."

94. "Therefore (remember this is the truth) who-

ever works deeds of righteousness and has faith in God, his endeavour will not be in vain. We [are there] to record his right deeds."

"What," comments the Maulana, "was the sum and substance of the teaching of all the prophets who appeared in different ages and among different people? What was their message to mankind of different ages and groups? Was it one or many? Verse 92 in measured words declares that their message was one only, and it was this—"You are one single brotherhood of people, the Cherisher or Protector of you all is one only. Therefore do not divide yourselves, worship Him only."

"But people forgot this teaching, and cut up Religion into numerous bits and made several religions out of it, and each group cut itself adrift from another. Diversity instead of unity, separation instead of union became their battle-cry. But in the end everyone has to return to Him. There everything will be shown up, and every group will see where its forgetfulness of the right thing had led it.

"Glory be to God. By the wonderful magic of its diction the Qurân has in one brief verse compressed whole volumes on this subject. And then it is not a mere statement, it is so put that it becomes one unbreakable chain of reasoning: (a) No matter how many divisions you may have created, your brotherhood is verily one; (b) I am the sole Protector of you all, and there is no other; (c) When the whole of mankind

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is one brotherhood and their Protector is one without a second, then why should not the frame of worship and obeisance be also one? Why should there be two? Therefore worship only Him, for you are one and for One alone. There is all through the mention of One and not more. The word *Therefore* here clinches the whole argument.

"All the three unities are condensed in this one verse: The unity of brotherhood, the unity of God, and the unity of religion and worship. And these three unities are the essential principles of the message of the Qurân. The Qurân everywhere proclaims the same message, and lays the whole foundation of its teaching and warning on these. Unity of brotherhood means that in the multifarious diversity of mankind is hidden its unity. Forget not this. However diverse may be your races, countries, tongues, you are one family of the human race, and you are really one brotherhood. Unity of God means that no matter how many different names of God you may have coined, no matter how many different places of worship you may have established, no matter how many different conceptions you may have formed of Him, the differences you have created cannot make the Reality different. Just as you are one brotherhood, in the same way your Protector is also One, and no other. Unity of worship means that if there is one brotherhood, there should be one religion only and not more. Therefore right conduct consists

in worshipping only one God and not to be divided and separated in this matter.

“In one verse again (94) have been clearly explained the essentials of salvation and righteousness. That is in spite of mankind having been cut up into so many different groups, the essentials of salvation and righteousness are the same. The Qurân says they have been the same throughout the ages—Faith in God and Right Conduct. The endeavour of the man who works righteously and who is filled with faith in God will never be in vain, it is sure to be accepted of God. Bear in mind the word ‘whoever.’ The Jews said, ‘Become Jews’; the Nazarenes said, ‘Become Nazarenes’; the Qurân says, ‘Whoever works deeds of righteousness and has faith in God.’ No matter who he is, if he have faith in God and acts righteously, his faith and his work will never go in vain. He is sure to have his reward. That is the law. ‘His faith and his work will go on Our record. Who can rub it off Our record? Let every one in the world regard it as wasted, it will be there written ineffaceably in Our account.’ What an important proposition this is, and yet if you look at the commentaries on the Qurân, the whole importance has been lost in a maze of irrelevant disputation.”

Again he says in another place, commenting on the text forbidding the making of any distinction between the various prophets of the world: “The Qurân says

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that it is the duty of everyone who desires to walk in the way of God to make no distinction between various prophets and between various scriptures, to believe in them equally and to deny none. This should be his attitude, viz. that 'Truth wherever revealed and from whomsoever revealed is Truth, and I believe in It.' "

One more text, and I have done. I do not think the Maulana can have any patience with those fundamentalists who divorce creed from conduct. His commentary on a verse in the Qurân makes his view absolutely clear. He says:

"The Jews believed that they were the chosen of the Lord, and that the religious truths that God gave them were their exclusive property. The Qurân gives the lie to this. The fanaticism of the Jews knew no bounds. They used to say that because they were Jews they were exempt from the fire of Hell, and even if God did send them to Hell, He would not do so out of His wrath, but in order that they may be cleansed in the fire and return to Heaven. The Qurân exposes the hollowness of this pretension and asks, 'Where did you get the thought that every Jew had been assured of salvation and exempted from the fire of Hell? Has God given you a charter of salvation? If you have no proof for this, are you not denying God and attributing a lie to Him?' Here is the Qurânic text: '(Remember ye, Mussalmans!) Salvation does not depend upon your desires, nor on those of other people who had

sacred Books. [The Divine Law is that] whoever works evil shall have to bear the fruit of it. No helper or friend will he find to save him from the wrath of God.' Just as he who takes arsenic must die, no matter whether he be a Jew or a non-Jew, and just as he who drinks milk must flourish, no matter whether he be a Jew or a non-Jew, even so in the spiritual world everyone must reap even as he sows, no matter what his faith or religion."

I reminded the Maulana of the Rabbi Cohen of Texas, who, when asked why among the people he helped and succoured there were no Jews, exclaimed, "Why, no. There wasn't one. What difference does that make? In this town there is no such thing as Methodist mumps, Baptist domestic troubles, Presbyterian poverty, or Catholic broken legs." The Maulana said: "That indeed is the right attitude."

Does the Maulana believe in the domination of one religious group over another? In his statement made before the court in 1922 the Maulana has indeed used the phrase "sovereignty of Islam." But his commentary makes his meaning abundantly clear. The word "Islam," he has made it clear, "means the acceptance of truth and acting according to it. The Qurân says that the essence of religion is the same everywhere, viz. to follow the path ordained by God. That path of Right holds not only for mankind but for the whole of creation." Sovereignty of Islam, therefore, means

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nothing more than the sovereignty of those in whose thought, word and deed is reflected complete surrender to God, or to use the Biblical language those who accept the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Islam, he says over and over again, is no new religion; it is simply a call to those who had strayed away from God and the paths of righteousness to come back to God and His righteousness.



# CHARACTERISTICS

Of a tall, erect and stately figure and with eyes that flash intelligence and inspire awe the Maulana reminds one of those great figures like Hakim Ajmal Khan and Dr. Ansari, who represented in their lives the best in Islamic culture. There is a polish and refinement of manner that compels respect wherever he goes, but there is also a reserve which does not make it easy for one to class him with some of those leaders who are accessible to everyone, who will be pestered by all and sundry, and who therefore, whether they want it or not, make themselves popular everywhere. His deep learning and insatiable appetite for knowledge combined with his contemplative temperament make it impossible for him to go and mix with the masses, listen to their endless tales of woe and carry comfort to them. Not that there is any lack of feeling in him for the downtrodden of the land. As I heard him speak the other day on the implications of Khadi, I felt as though I should like him to go on for hours on that absorbing theme. "Swaraj," he said, "has no meaning until it annihilates the yawning gulf between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots,' and I cannot think of anything

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better than Khadi and the universal use of it to make us feel somewhat at one with the millions of our downtrodden brethren. Do we want to come down from the high pedestal that we have occupied for ages? Do we want our less fortunate brethren to work side by side with us and to feel the pride and pleasure of working for freedom and to feel the glow of freedom as we should feel it? Do you want them to awake and arise with you? There is no other alternative before us but the universalization of Khadi." And yet I have an impression that his make-up would not allow him to sit down in a village plying his wheel. He knows this very well himself, and I think there are few leaders who are more conscious of their limitations than is the Maulana.

That in a sense is his weakness and his strength. His scholarship and his intellectual temperament have given him what is called a cross-bench mind. He weighs the pros and cons of a subject in the golden scales and often does not seem to make up his mind. He has an intellectual grasp superior to many in the Congress camp, and he can often explain and expound a policy with a brilliance and a clarity that is unsurpassed. But sometimes it makes it difficult for people to know where he stands. Pandit Motilal and he used to be great friends. In fact during the great days of the Swaraj Party, Pandit Motilal always used to look to the Maulana for intellectual and moral support. But

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often, when the Maulana would see Gandhiji's point in the twinkling of an eye and say: "Mahatmaji, I saw the point at once," the old Panditji would in delicious banter remark: "But the pity is, Maulana, that you see things too quickly!" And there would be roars of laughter.

But that, as I said, is his strength too. There is no greater diplomat among the Congress ranks than the Maulana, and once he sees and accepts a position there is no one who has his intellectual resourcefulness to explain it from all possible points of view, in all possible aspects. That is what makes Gandhiji turn to him on many a crucial occasion.

But that leads me to give an inkling of the deep attachment that binds the Maulana and the Mahatma. In 1939 the question of the Sind ministry was a most difficult question to solve, as it has been always. Things came to such a pass that the matter was brought to Gandhiji. The Maulana said: "My own mind points in one direction, but as in all these questions I always accept your moral instinct, in this matter I will accept your judgment without arguing with you." Gandhiji said: "No, but we have decided that in all such matters yours should be the final word, and I would ask Vallabhbhai and Rajendrababu [members of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee] to accept your decision." But the Maulana said: "With me your word is going to be the final word." There was a long affectionate

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tussle, at the end of which I think the Maulana lost and Gandhiji won.

I once asked the Maulana as to what was the source of his deep attachment to Gandhiji. He said: "Apart from his great intellect, it was his stainless truth that attracted me towards him. But until 1926 I was more or less critical. Then I happened to read an article of his in *Young India*, in which he laid bare his soul in criticizing a trivial lapse by Mrs. Gandhi. She had forgotten to make over to the manager of the Ashram a gift that someone had given her. 'There,' I said to myself, 'is a man whose truth not even his enemies can doubt,' and I was astonished at the length to which his truth would carry him."

This will also indicate the unique position that the Maulana occupies in Congress affairs. He has occupied that position all these years, even when he was not Congress President, and whether he holds that office or not he will continue to enjoy that position during all the active years that are vouchsafed to him by God.

And yet he fights shy of positions of power. He might have been the leader of the party in any of the legislatures both during the pre-"autonomy" days and after. But he scrupulously steered clear of that course. He was always in the counsels of Deshabandhu Das and Pandit Motilalji; they would not take a step on important occasions without his advice. But he

preferred to remain in the position of an adviser and never thought of being in the actual fray.

He is at his best when left alone with his books and his intellectual pursuits. The late Lokamanya Tilak used to say with regard to himself that what he might well have given to the Goddess of Learning he had to give to his country, and really if all his time outside prison had not been devoted to the service of the motherland, we might have had from him many books full of the profound learning and scholarship like the *Arctic Homes in the Vedas* or his commentary on the Bhagwad Gita called *Gita Rahasya*. And so it is with the Maulana. Very few people know that the great Tilak was a great philologist too. Well, the Maulana is also a great philologist. But his philological pursuits are indulged in mostly nowadays at the breakfast table. He asks for the equivalents of words in Indian languages, and whenever he comes across a new word which catches his fancy he beams with delight. Once I used a word which is common in Gujarati for the word "postscript." It delighted him. It was composed of two Persian words really, but whilst it had become current in Gujarati it was quite new to the great Persian and Arabic scholar. Often enough thereafter he would tell me: "That word *taza qualam* is beautifully coined, and we must adopt it." When the Working Committee members sit down to lunch or dinner they try to beguile the monotony of their sometimes arid

and even acrimonious discussions by "mere frivolity." This with the Maulana takes the shape of discussions of the menus of various countries and various ages in history of which the Maulana has an accurate knowledge, and then he breaks out into some of his philological titbits which keep the company entertained and instructed all the time. "You Tamilians," he would say, "are very fond of tamarind, but you perhaps do not know the derivation of that word. The Spanish word is *tamarindo*, but the Spaniards borrowed it from the Arabs. In Arabic the word is *Tamar-e-Hind*, *tamar* meaning 'date' and *Hind* 'India.' There were no dates in India, and this was the fruit that most corresponded with the date. So they called it 'the date of India.' " Someone mentioned the word "religion," and the Maulana immediately explained the distinction between *deen* and *mazhab*. "*Mazhab*," he said, "is loosely called religion, but in Arabic the word is *deen*, and *mazhab* means the 'way' or 'the road.' And *deen* is the same as *Denaye* in Avesta, meaning duty, rule, law; and that really is the meaning of *deen*, and as the word is in Avesta it should be in Sanskrit too. I will not hazard the guess that it is the same as *dharma*, though *dharma* also has the same connotation. It is amazing how words have come down from age to age and from country to country. Look at the Sanskrit word *Samnyas*. It means renouncing the world and going to the forest. Now *Samnyas* seems to have become *Sassan* in old Persian,

and a dynasty in Persia was called *Sassanide*, as its first king was said to have led an ascetic's or *Samnyasi's* life before his accession to the throne. And oh, for the days when it was so easy to make kings! A king died intestate and left instructions to appoint as his successor whomever one came upon immediately the gates of the city were opened!"

The Maulana is a great Oriental scholar and his knowledge of Arabic and Persian is profound, but when he speaks he speaks such chaste, elegant and yet simple Urdu that all can follow him without difficulty. Indeed, his language is what Gandhiji calls Hindustani, the *lingua franca* of India. He never seems to be in want of the right word, and sometimes even his casual talk is pregnant with homely and telling similes and with meaning which makes a way into your understanding as nothing else does. I happened in 1936 to be casually talking to him for a few minutes, and someone referred to the simple faith and devotion of our masses. I said: "It is because of that faith that we fought several campaigns with a fair amount of success." This casual remark drew from him a commentary which I wish I could reproduce in his own language. It was an education and a treat to hear him. He said: "Oh yes, it did all that, and it still can do so. But the difficulty is this. Religion is a force whose power it is impossible to gauge. A bullock cart in charge of a stupid driver may at the worst cause an accident resulting in some

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injury to the driver and one or two more people. But we know what happens when there is a railway accident. Hundreds of lives are lost and untold damage is done. Religion is like the mighty steam engine which needs to be in charge of a skilful and wideawake driver. In the hands of an unworthy driver it can cause untold misery. To our great misfortune religion has fallen into unworthy hands. They have turned it into irreligion, and I do not know where we are going."

Though he speaks little English, his library is full of all the best English and French classics. He has read many of the English poets, including Shakespeare and Wordsworth and Shelley, but the one he likes best, he told me, is Byron. He seems to agree with Goethe's dictum that the English "show no poet who is to be compared with him," and apart from his poetry the thing that appeals to him in Byron is the heroic way in which he espoused the cause of the liberation of Greece and met his death in the attempt, the part he played in revolutionary politics everywhere and his impassioned plea through all his utterances for freedom of life and thought.

The world's great thinkers are all there in his library—Goethe, Spinoza, Rousseau, Marx, Havelock Ellis—there are the Upanishads and the Vedas, there are all the volumes of the People of all Nations, Historians, History, International Library of Famous Literature,



and so on. He has with his voracious appetite read all the Waverley novels and everything of Dumas and Hugo, especially the novels about the French Revolution. Tolstoy and Ruskin he has read more than once, and books of history and philosophy are his constant companions. Once on the railway train I found him with a volume on Nyaya Vaisheshika Philosophy, and he has time even in this busy age to enjoy a volume on Madame Jeanne Pompadour. The latest volumes on the Prophet and Omar the Great are there on a rack of books opposite his writing-table, but so also are books of Flaubert, and among them *Madame Bovary*! I need not mention numerous cupboards full of Arabic and Persian and Turkish books whose names even are unknown to us.

He keeps himself in constant touch with the outside world by a voluminous correspondence. Among his correspondents have been the late Zaghlul Pasha and Fathi Bey, who was his great friend. He was in close touch with the late Mustafa Kemal Pasha and other leading men of Turkey. Almost all the leaders of the old Young Turks' Party which brought about the revolution of 1908 through its "Union and Progress" programme were the personal friends of the Maulana. This party remained in power till the beginning of the last European war. Ahmed Reda, Speaker of the Turkish Parliament, Dr. Selahuddin, Enver Pasha and Djaved Bey had correspondence with him. The famous

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Radical of Iran, Taqui Zadeh, was amongst the friends of the Maulana.

His absorption in his studies has given him a kind of predilection for loneliness, and though he is most affable and even deferential he has very few friends. Though a finished conversationalist, he inclines most towards reticence. Due to his reserved nature, little is known of his life to most of us beyond the fact that he loves a cup of tea and that he is a kind of chain-smoker.

His life is absolutely simple, and in his office room and drawing-room you do not find anything but books. There are no photographs even. Regarding his cigarettes, I asked him what happened to him when he went to jail. He said: "I am glad you have asked this question. I had ten cigarettes in my cigarette-case when I was taken to Alipur Jail in 1921. I smoked two and handed over the balance to the jail authorities. Deshabandhu Das twitted me, saying I should need them in jail. I said, 'Not until I am released.' And I tell you within a short time I did not even miss them." In this respect he resembles the late Pandit Motilal Nehru, who once told me: "I love the good things of life, but I am not wedded to them. I can give them up at a moment's notice." And he differs from men like Mr. De Valera, or say Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Mr. Thomas once told Mr. De Valera that he was surprised that he "had no petty vices," in that he did

not even smoke. "No, Mr. Thomas," said Mr. De Valera, "you English are responsible for that. You may remember that on one occasion—memorable to me—I was arrested and taken to your Lincoln Jail. Just before we arrived at the prison I said to the policeman in charge of me that I would like a cigarette. He had no objection, so I lit one. Then looking at the cigarette I mused: 'I suppose the British intend to hang me, and this will be my last cigarette. If, however, I should get out of this jail I will never have another cigarette, so that I can retain the memory of this one.' As you know I did get out, and have never smoked tobacco since." An exactly similar thing happened to Sardar Vallabhbhai in 1930, when he was arrested for the first time. He was not going to be hanged, his term of imprisonment then was ludicrously brief—only three months—but he refused to accept a cigarette from the police official escorting him and has not since touched tobacco. The Maulana lived without a cigarette for over fifteen months, but had one immediately on release and did not decline to smoke in the Meerut Prison where he was allowed the liberty.

His habits are regular, he is a very early riser, has no other "petty vices" save smoking, and I do not think he ever visits places of entertainment. He shuns shows and processions and rarely accepts invitations to late dinners and the like. A finished and polished

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speaker, he has none of the strength or weaknesses of a demagogue. His contribution to a debate is always most valuable, and he is at his best in committee meetings. He can sweep audiences off their feet by the direct, simple, incisive eloquence of his speech, but he is not essentially a man of the people.

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Followed years of self-revelation and self-examination. Swaraj was to come in a year—under conditions which people conveniently forgot. They remembered not that the conditions were not fulfilled, but they remembered that Swaraj had not come. The effort that they had put forth was evidently for that year. Many went back to their old professions, many regretted that they had sacrificed anything. The most discontented were the intellectuals who had no heart in the constructive programme suggested by Gandhiji as an indispensable condition and of preparation for another struggle. They were impatient for a revision and wanted to carry on the struggle through legislatures.

On his release in January 1923 from prison the Maulana found that the Congress organization had become a house divided against itself. Gandhiji on the eve of his arrest had left only one message, viz. that of constructive work as an antidote for the spirit of violence of which the Chaurichaura outrage was a symptom. He had gone to jail with full faith in that programme and in the nation's capacity to carry it out. There was a group in the country which wanted loyally

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to carry out Gandhiji's message. It was headed by Shri C. Rajagopalachari, and included leaders like Sardar Patel, Babu Rajendraprasad and Dr. Ansari. They were keen on maintaining the fourfold boycott, and so came to be called "no-changers." The other group, led by the late Pandit Motilal Nehru, the late Deshabandhu Das and the late Vithalbhai Patel, represented those who felt that political results called for political action. They too swore by non-co-operation as a principle, as opposed to the Liberal doctrine of co-operation in the system of dyarchy. But they did not favour the continuance of the boycott of the legislatures. These, they held, ought to be captured by Congressmen and used to wreck dyarchy from within. They came to be known as "Pro-changers," as they wanted this change in Gandhiji's programme. The controversy between these groups sometimes became highly academic and even acrimonious. The Maulana made his own position clear in the course of a much-awaited statement which he issued soon after his release from prison. "No political programme," he contended, "could be held as sacrosanct. It had to be judged on its merits." He took a purely common sense and pragmatic view of the situation. The formula of non-co-operation which Gandhiji had given to the country was dear to him, but as a man of the world he saw that neither the ideal of non-co-operation nor that of non-violence would be served if the two groups

continued to wrangle among themselves and neutralize one another's efforts. He therefore set himself to the task of establishing some kind of co-ordination of activity if not unity between them without identifying himself with either. In this work he found himself in his element. He enjoyed the confidence and regard of both the groups. He threw himself heart and soul into his task, often undertaking long tours for consultations and discussions. Among the Mussalmans there was the Jamiat-ul-Ulema group. Having at the outset of the non-co-operation movement issued the *fatwa* (injunction), which declared co-operation with Government as sinful from a religious point of view, they felt they could not with any show of consistency now favour the entry of Congressmen into legislatures which were the creation of Government. At the Gaya Session of the Indian National Congress they had reiterated their *fatwa*. It was clear that there could be no compromise so long as this authoritarian objection stood in the way. It was a task to dislodge them from that stand. But the Maulana proved up to it, though it must have taxed to the utmost his resourcefulness and dialectical skill.

A special session of the Congress was held at Delhi on September 15, 1923, under the presidentship of the Maulana. In his address he presented his compromise formula, which was that those who believed in the Council-entry programme should be permitted

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to do so in order to capture those bodies and non-co-operate from within, while those who did not believe in that programme should devote themselves to carrying out the constructive programme of the Congress. The formula was adopted, and the Parliamentary programme of the Congress thus came into being. Looking back upon this episode now, one cannot help being struck by the uncommon political shrewdness of which the Maulana gave proof at that juncture. "I knew that the Council-entry programme would not carry us very far," he explained to me, "but I had my eye on the future. Since the Parliamentary mentality had taken hold of a considerable and influential section of Congressmen and Congress leaders, I felt that in the absence of any programme of direct action the Parliamentary programme might serve a useful purpose."

It is idle to speculate about the might-have-beens and whether the Council-entry interlude did not as a matter of fact retard the direct action programme which Gandhiji had in prospect as soon as the atmosphere in the country was purged of the spirit of violence. The Maulana's action had, however, one definite result. It saved the Congress from being divided into two warring camps and the masses from demoralization which would have followed during Gandhiji's imprisonment. It also paved the way for Gandhiji's final step, which while preserving the prin-



ciple of non-co-operation converted what was a political compromise into a living unity.

Then came the Ali brothers, who after a little bit of vacillation also took the same attitude. Gandhiji on release from prison in 1924 had no difficulty in making his decision. It was no use compelling people to go against their cherished inclinations or to impose a mental attitude on them. He retained the opinion that Council-entry was inconsistent with non-co-operation, but he counselled the "no-changers" to abandon their attitude of hostility towards the Council-goers. He went on yielding more and more to them in the conviction that they would become wiser with experience. "The best way in which I can help them," he said, "is by removing myself out of the way and by concentrating solely upon constructive work with the help of the Congress and in its name, and that too only so far as educated Indians will permit me to do so."

The Council programme was quite successful so far as fireworks went; there were magnificent speeches, Government sustained defeat upon defeat, but all these made us no stronger. And as years went by demoralization crept into the ranks, and Pandit Motilal Nehru had often to take drastic disciplinary action. He had himself begun to get tired of the arid programme in the legislatures, and his intimate friend and colleague Deshabandhu Das had died, leaving him desolate and forlorn.

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Hindu-Muslim tension was growing every year; there were fierce riots in Multan, Barcilly, Nagpur and other places in 1927. Unity Conferences were held; good resolutions were adopted, only to be broken by those who cared not for these resolutions. Gandhiji worked away in silence at Sabarmati, rarely attending committee meetings, and even when he attended the Congress he rarely addressed the delegates. At the Madras Congress the resolution altering the objective of the Congress to independence was passed in Gandhiji's absence. He would direct local Satyagraha campaigns like the unique campaign in Bardoli in 1928, where Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, one of the staunchest of his followers, following his guidance and inspiration, was able to mould heroes out of clay. It was not the Council's programme but these successful struggles that were again changing the mentality of the country.

The announcement of the coming of the Simon Commission became the occasion for another country-wide awakening. The boycott of this Commission was as complete and effective as the boycott of the Prince of Wales in 1921, and the death of Lala Lajpatrai, which was hastened by a brutal attack on his chest by a police official, did everything that was needed to produce a revolutionary mentality in the youths of the country. There were savage *lathi* charges, among the victims of which in Lucknow were men like Pandits Jawaharlal Nehru and Govind Ballabh Pant. The story

of this charge is told by Pandit Nehru in an unforgettable chapter in his *Autobiography*, "Experience of Lathi Charges." "And those faces, full of hate and blood-lust, almost mad, with no trace of sympathy or touch of humanity! Probably the faces on our side just then were equally hateful to look at, and the fact that we were mostly passive did not fill our minds and hearts with love for our opponents, or add to the beauty of our countenances." Anyone who cannot understand Pandit Jawaharlal's uncompromising hostility to British Imperialism must read at least this out of the many poignant chapters in his great book. The iron had gone into his soul. And by this time Pandit Motilal Nehru had frankly got disgusted with the Council programme. A year's ultimatum given at the Calcutta Congress held under his presidentship, asking Government to concede immediately the national demand for Dominion status, or to be faced with the Congress claim for complete independence, was nearing its end. In August 1929 the A.I.C.C. resolved to call upon the Congress members of the legislatures to resign their seats. Lord Irwin, the then Viceroy, made an announcement in October, in reply to which the Working Committee and other prominent leaders of the country published a statement in which they made it clear that they would be satisfied if the conference Lord Irwin had proposed "would meet not to discuss when Dominion Status is to be established, but to

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frame a scheme of Dominion Constitution for India," and asked for certain tangible signs of "a real change of heart" and a real desire on the part of the British people to see India "a free and self-respecting nation," as Gandhiji explained it in a further statement. The debate in the House of Commons and the House of Lords made it abundantly clear that there was no such change and no such desire, and a meeting between Lord Irwin and the leaders that took place a little later, although it was cordial, did not improve matters. The events thus led irresistibly on to the Lahore Congress resolution declaring independence to be the objective and civil disobedience to be the means to be employed for its achievement. The president, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, poured out his righteous indignation in his presidential address and made a passionate call to the country not to rest until complete independence was won.

Where were the Muslims at this juncture? The Ali brothers had since 1924 drifted farther and farther away from the Congress, and though they attended the Lahore Congress, they had done so only to warn Gandhiji that the Muslims would not co-operate with the Congress in its campaign of civil disobedience and it would be disastrous for the Congress to launch the campaign without Muslim co-operation. Dr. Ansari, who was all for the Congress, was also afraid of the consequences and therefore far from enthusiastic. So

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were some of the other Congress-minded Muslim leaders. But Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had no misgivings in the matter. He threw his whole weight on the side of the Congress, and he had no doubt that the Muslim masses would not fail to respond to the Congress call. His optimism was fully justified by the events, as one Muslim province, the North-West Frontier, alone sent several thousand people to jail and underwent untold hardship and suffering. The response of the Muslims in other provinces was in no way negligible, and when Maulana Abul Kalam Azad after his imprisonment in 1930 as the Acting President of the Congress named Dr. Ansari as his successor, the latter had no hesitation in filling his place.

The campaign of 1930 was no less epic in character than the one in 1921. In a sense it was even more epic in that it evoked a very much larger measure of sacrifice and suffering and gave evidence of exemplary non-violence in face of organized and brutal violence on the part of Government. Men who had remained aloof until now joined the struggle, and the peasants sacrificed their all. In the mass movement that followed Gandhiji's historic Salt March, thousands upon thousands heroically bore *lathi* charges, women bore brutal assaults, and some lost their lives. Even the Government were tired of the shameful exhibition of their brute strength against these unoffending millions, and

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Lord Irwin took early opportunity to cry a halt. Followed the historic negotiations between Lord Irwin and Gandhiji and a truce which did honour to the genuine desire of the Viceroy for peace.

This is hardly the place to follow the sequence of events after the truce. They have been narrated by Pandit Nehru in his *Autobiography* and by Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya in the *History of the Congress*. Two or three things may be noted here. The aftermath of the Irwin-Gandhi Agreement proved that there was neither any desire on the part of Government to part with power, nor any inclination on the part of the officials in India to abandon the spirit of domination and to adopt a spirit of service. But the Congress Working Committee exercised the patience of Job to prevent the breakdown of the truce and urged Gandhiji to attend the Round Table Conference in spite of his predilections to the contrary. Before he proceeded there the Working Committee had defined their attitude on the communal question and declared that "the Communal question can only be solved on strictly national lines and that the Congress assures the Sikhs, the Muslims and other minorities that no solution thereof (i.e. of the Communal question) in any future constitution will be acceptable to the Congress that does not give full satisfaction to the parties concerned"; but in view of the situation in the country the Working Committee adopted a scheme "as a compromise between the pro-

posals based on undiluted communalism and undiluted nationalism."

How Gandhiji went to the Round Table Conference, how he tried to have Dr. Ansari, the representative of Nationalist Muslims, on the conference and failed, how his efforts at a communal agreement were foiled by a clique created by Government, is a story that is no part of this biographical sketch. What Mr. Benthall, an English commercial representative for India in the Round Table Conference, wrote in a secret circular is a sad commentary on the part played by the British Government and one more striking proof of the fact that they had reduced the "Divide and Rule" policy to a diabolically clever technique. Mr. Benthall reports with exultation that "Mr. Gandhi landed in India with empty hands," that "after the General Election the right wing of Government made up its mind to break up the Congress and to fight the [Round Table] conference and to fight the Congress," that the "Muslims have become firm allies of the Europeans," and that "they are very satisfied with their own position and are prepared to work with us," that "the Muslims were all right; the Minorities' Pact and Government's general attitude ensured that. So were the Princes and the Minorities."

This all too brief narration is necessary to understand the Maulana's attitude on the communal question. The hand of death soon after removed Dr. Ansari, one

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of the greatest of the Nationalist Muslims, and the Maulana was left as one of the few outstanding Muslims in the Congress leadership. But the events had burnt the conviction deep on his mind that a solution of the communal problem was impossible unless and until the British Government had withdrawn and left the two communities free to resolve the quarrel between themselves.

Throughout the troubled years after Gandhiji's return from the Round Table Conference and his imprisonment and the ruthless repression carried on by the Willingdon Government, his release and thereafter, the Maulana has been consistently with the National Congress. Civil disobedience was suspended, and it was decided to revive the Swaraj Party; and Gandhiji declared in a letter addressed to Dr. Ansari that though "his views on the utility of the legislatures are well known," "it is not only the right but it is the duty of every Congressman, who for some reason or other does not want to or cannot take part in civil resistance and who has faith in entry into the legislatures, to seek entry and form combinations in order to prosecute the programme."



### XIII

#### AS A CONSTRUCTIVE WORKER

How, in spite of the consensus of opinion among Congressmen that the new reforms conceding a modicum of autonomy in the provinces were unacceptable, the Congress Working Committee decided to accept offices in the provinces where Congressmen were in a majority in the Legislative Assemblies, is a chapter of absorbing interest, but it does not belong to this book.

Along with acceptance of offices the Working Committee of the Congress appointed in 1937 a Parliamentary Sub-Committee consisting of three of its veterans, tried, trusted and true, all of whom had been Congress presidents, and none of whom had an axe to grind—Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Babu Rajendraprasad and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Gunther, the popular American journalist, has called the first “a part of the brain and spiritual enlightenment,” the second the “heart,” and the third “the ruthless fist” of the Congress. It is an American way of putting things, a way which sees everything in terms of European and American politics, which, unlike Indian politics claiming to be based on non-violence, are based on

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anything but non-violence. It may be a picturesque but by no means a correct way. The Parliamentary Sub-Committee was formed in order to help the Congress ministries and the Congressmen in Legislative Assemblies to carry out the sacred pledges they had made to the country. The task required all the organizing skill, all the capacity to maintain discipline, even at the risk of unpopularity, and all the rigid impartiality and the moral vigilance that they were capable of. Each of the three members were possessed of these qualities in a greater or less degree, but each approached his task with a conscientiousness and a spirit of co-operation which is rarely to be found. Each had his zones of work allotted to him because of the large size of the area in which the Committee had to operate, but there was joint and several responsibility attaching to all that they did. I have to content myself here with the work for which special credit must be given to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

Let no one suppose that because he is predominantly a scholar and a thinker and a diplomat the Maulana had done no constructive work. I have especially in mind the Hindu-Muslim riots in Calcutta in the year 1926 or 1927 (I am not sure of the year). During those days when everyone who actively helped in restoring peace had to carry his life in his hand, the Maulana went about the length and breadth of that vast city, pleading with the Hindus at one place, arguing with

his co-religionists at another, and desperately trying to limit the area of the disturbances. "In a thickly populated Hindu locality Mussalman tailors from a distant locality used every day to come and earn their living. I proceeded to the place," said the Maulana to me, narrating the story. "Not less than sixty to seventy tailors had been harboured by the Hindus in a Hindu house, but they would not dare to go home through areas where hooliganism was yet rampant. I thanked the Hindus for saving these people's lives, put them all in lorries and escorted them home. There were Hindus in a similar plight in Mussalman localities. A Mussalman had sheltered thirteen Hindus (eleven men and two women) in his house. At dead of night there were no *tongas* (hired horse-carriages) to be had and no taxis. I appealed to the Municipal Corporation for a taxi, put the refugees in this taxi and sent them to their homes. For three days and nights I had no rest or peace. At about midnight one day I received a note from Asansol to the effect that certain people had left the place for Calcutta two days before for a certain destination, but there was no news of them. I sought them out, sent news to their relatives, and saw that they got back home safe."

This story should have belonged to an earlier chapter, but I have deliberately brought it in here to describe the Maulana's constructive genius. I will say nothing regarding the Maulana's contribution to the

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solution of various local difficulties as they arose from time to time, nor regarding the Shia-Sunni dispute in Lucknow to the settlement of which the Maulana has devoted a large part of his time and energy. It still continues to be a baffling problem, but I am sure that if anything can solve it ultimately it will be the Maulana's wise guidance and influence.

I come now to that work of the Maulana which entitles him to the gratitude of hundreds of thousands of peasants, and which of all the work that he has done will be reckoned as of the most enduring character. I mean his work for the tenants in Bihar. One of the solemn promises in the Congress Election manifesto was to give substantial relief to the peasants and tenants. The question was most difficult in the Zamindari provinces of the United Provinces and Bihar, inasmuch as it was not a matter directly between the peasants and Government but one between the tenants and the Zamindars (landlords) on the one hand and between both these and the Government on the other. A deputation of the Zamindars in Bihar went to Calcutta to meet the Congress leaders in October 1937, and met Babu Rajendraprasad. He felt that it would be a great thing if the Maulana's help could be secured in bringing about an amicable settlement between the Zamindars and the tenants. They also waited upon the Maulana, who readily agreed to go to Patna and give whatever help he could. He went, and for several days

worked in closest co-operation with Babu Rajendraprasad. They kept in close touch also with the Prime Minister, who with some of his colleagues would attend the conference whenever a stage was reached which offered opportunities for taking decisions on points at issue. Before discussing with the Zamindars, both the Maulana and Babu Rajendraprasad had long talks with such Congressmen as were considered by them to be particularly interested in the tenants' problem. They ascertained from them their wishes and on that basis they carried on their talks with the Zamindars. It was not to be expected that the Zamindars would accept the tenants' demands in their entirety. Both the Maulana and Babu Rajendraprasad, however, tried their best to bring them as near the tenants' demand as possible.

There were ticklish questions involving the most delicate negotiations. "The first thing," said the Maulana to me, "that I got them to accept was the fundamental principle, viz. that the burden of the tenant ought to be reduced so that he may be able to keep body and soul together. Once they accepted this, the percentage was the next question. After that was settled came the question of dealing with refractory tenants. The existing law enabled a Zamindar to ruin the tenant and deprive him of his all. But once the principle of justice was accepted, how could they insist on selling land and belongings worth more than the

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amount of default? Once it seemed as though the whole negotiations would break on the question. We got the Prime Minister to adjourn the House pending further negotiations. I appealed to the Zamindars to do everything with good grace and not to take away with one hand what they gave with the other. And I must say that they responded gracefully. The moral result was superb. In some cases even before the Act came into being the Zamindars began to behave as though the Act was already in force."

And the material results were equally important and considerable. Rent has been reduced on an average by about 25 per cent, in some cases the rate of reduction being as high as 40 to 50 per cent. Tenants have secured rights which make them practically proprietors of their lands, subject only to payment of rent. Their movables and houses are not liable to be attached or sold on account of arrears of rent, and the holding too is not liable to be sold in its entirety, but only such part of it as is considered sufficient to clear the arrears, and even that too for a price which in the opinion of Government is fair. Thus they will get full value for their land if it is sold by the landlord for arrears of revenue. They are free to sell it or otherwise to transfer it to anyone they like. If, however, they want a distribution of rent as between the portion sold and the portion retained, they have to pay a small fee to the landlord. The landlord is bound to recognize all transfers.

Tenants have the right to build a house, plant an orchard, or dig a well on their land. They are not liable to be ejected for arrears of rent. They have thus been made practically independent of the landlord, save only to the extent of having to pay the rent to the landlord which too has been reduced.

There has been another great gain. The question of agricultural income-tax to be imposed on the Zamindars could not be solved without an understanding between Zamindars and Government. The question came up for the first time in Bihar. The understanding, thanks again to the intervention of the Maulana and Babu Rajendraprasad, was arrived at and income-tax was imposed by legislation for the first time in Bihar, and for that matter in the whole of India, and the landlords allowed the legislation to pass with their consent. This imposes on them a burden of some 40 to 50 lakhs of rupees (500,000) a year. The reduction in rent alone has meant to them a loss, and to the tenants a gain, of something like 2 to 2½ crores of rupees (20 to 25 million) per year!

I am grateful to Babu Rajendraprasad for these details, who whilst giving them paid a tribute to the Maulana for his part in these negotiations which I reproduce here:

“During the talks with the Zamindars and the tenants the Maulana’s great acumen and power of persuasion came into full play. He started with a handicap, not being familiar with the details of tenancy

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law in Bihar. But as the discussions progressed he soon acquired sufficient knowledge of this complicated law and was able to take quick decisions and, what was more, to bring others to his own point of view. The discussions lasted for many days on the first occasion and most points were settled. But the Maulana Saheb had to pay a second visit and stay at Patna for several days again. The agreement between the Congress and Zamindars was thus hammered out after long discussion. We purposely left out the Kisan Sabha from the negotiations, for we did not want to fetter their freedom to agitate for more if they thought it necessary. We felt that a legislation with the consent of the Zamindars could be passed quickly and the relief intended could reach the tenants sooner than if legislation had to be passed in the teeth of their opposition. And so it was. The law was passed within a few months of the Ministry taking office, and by the time it resigned rent reduction proceedings sanctioned by the new law had been finished in many places and had made much progress in the greater part of the province. I think Bihar is the only province where relief which the Congress Ministry intended and agreed to give to the tenantry has actually been given. Both in the matter of the tenancy and the income-tax legislation, on occasions when negotiations seemed to be on the breaking-point, the Maulana's great tact, method of approach and power of persuasion saved the situation."



#### XIV

#### THE CRISIS

But the Congress was not long destined to enjoy this spell of constructive effort. The international crisis, which had been lowering on the horizon for over a year, burst upon us in September last. It awakened the country to a sudden sense of reality. We had believed that with the enjoyment of a little bit of provincial autonomy we were marching towards our goal of independence. But the war proved that we did not count; we were still a dependency. Even before the declaration of war Indian troops had been sent to Singapore and Egypt without the consent of the Assembly, and with the declaration of war India was declared a belligerent country, as though India had no voice or will of her own and could have none. The Amendment of the Government of India Act deprived provincial autonomy of the little flicker of life it had, with the result that it became possible for the Central Government to interfere in the day-to-day administration of provinces, and rule by ordinances began. These were portents and enough to entitle the Working Committee of the Congress to call out the ministries and declare the inability of the Congress to offer any

co-operation to Government in these war measures. But the Working Committee after long deliberation decided to invite the British Government to declare their war aims in regard to democracy and imperialism, and how they were to apply to India, before they could determine the attitude of the Congress. What happened after this is fresh in the memory of every British and Indian student of affairs.

Britain responded to this first in a censorious and hectoring tone, and then by putting the policy of "Divide and Rule" in full operation. No doubt Gandhiji had extended his sympathy to the Allies and even advised the Working Committee to offer unconditional moral co-operation. But the members of the Working Committee, men of the world as they were, had no confidence that they could take the country with them in the acceptance of Gandhiji's advice. And there was nothing dishonourable in asking for obvious assurances. The Dominions during the last World War had insisted on being declared autonomous units of the Commonwealth. As the Maulana in his presidential address said: "Nations are being plunged into the blood and fire of war. Should we part with reason and reality so completely as not even to ask why this is being done and how this affects our destiny before plunging into this deluge of death and destruction?"

Events proved that the Working Committee were right in taking the practical man's point of view, and

declarations by British statesmen proved that the Working Committee had, by insisting on the declaration of war aims, spared Gandhiji a sad and sudden disillusionment. Gandhiji had taken Britain's war aims for granted. He soon found that his assumption had given more credit to the British Government than they deserved. Needless to say that the Maulana, as an important member of the Working Committee, has had a great part to play in all the Congress decisions since the war began.

History will judge which of the two was honourable or otherwise—the insistence of the Congress on the declaration by the British Government of their war aims, or the way in which the British have responded to it. The policy of "Divide and Rule" broke all efforts at communal unity in the Round Table Conference, and it shattered communal unity which had almost been attained at the Unity Conference in 1933, but never has discord shown itself at its ugliest as during the present crisis. All possible groups and parties whose grievances, fancied or real, could be exploited were invited and ranged on one side in order to show the world that there was a larger "non-Congress" India than "Congress" India. The Congress, undismayed by these tactics, declared its readiness to accept a constitution, framed by such of the representatives of "Congress" or "non-Congress" India as chose to be elected on it on adult or similar suffrage. The Muslim

League will not have this, but will have in preference the manipulation of these minorities.

The attitude adopted by the Muslim League during the past few months is still fresh in our memory. Every time the Congress expressed its readiness for a settlement they made it impossible by putting forward the extravagant claim that they speak on behalf of the whole of Muslim India. They made no effort to have the Congress Ministries removed when they were in power, they had never any occasion to appeal to the Governors to use safeguards because there had been no injustice calling for such use, and when the Congress Ministries resigned some of the members of the Muslim League had even appealed to the Ministries not to resign. But soon after the resignation they staged "a day of deliverance and thanksgiving" that the Muslims had been delivered of "majority" rule, they went on making extravagant demands one after another, and now they have beaten all previous records by insisting on a vivisection of India into "Muslim" India and "Hindu" India. The charge that the Congress Ministries had been anti-Muslim was not only a charge against the Congress but a charge against the Maulana. If the charge against the Congress was true, surely the Maulana as an important member of the Cabinet and of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee had been a traitor to his community in order to retain his position in the

Congress. A more preposterous accusation cannot be conceived. But the Maulana examined it in a cool and dispassionate statement of which the most important portions must be reproduced here:

“And now, when it has given up the Government of the eight provinces of its own choice and free will, what advice has the League President to offer to the Muslims of India? It is this, that they should march towards the mosques and thank God on their deliverance from the Congress Ministries, which have preferred Duty to Power, and have resigned not only on the issue of India’s freedom, but for the rights of all the downtrodden peoples of the East. It is difficult for me even to imagine that any group of Muslims, however at loggerheads with the Congress, would tolerate to be presented to the world in such colours.

“The Muslims have a full right to make whatever kind of struggle they deem fit in the cause of their rights and interests. But this is their internal dispute. They should under no circumstances take any step which can possibly be used against the freedom of India. The present attitude of Mr. Jinnah is leading them towards this unfortunate position. It clearly means that the Muslims are being made as tumbling-block in the path of India’s freedom. I warned the Muslims in 1912 against this. It wounds my heart to the core that the need of reiterating the same has again arisen after twenty-seven years.

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"And again, after all, why is Mr. Jinnah advising the Mussalmans to celebrate the day of 'deliverance'? Because they have been saved from all the 'atrocities of the Congress Ministries.' What was the quantity and quality of the aforesaid 'atrocities'? In the words of Mr. Jinnah 'the Congress Ministries were actuated by a decidedly anti-Muslim policy, and the Congress Ministries both in the discharge of the duties of the administration and in the legislatures have done their best to flout Muslim opinion, to destroy Muslim culture and interfered with their religious and social life and trampled their economic and political rights.' Now, if we admit for the time being that the picture which Mr. Jinnah has presented is correct, let us consider what conclusion can be derived from it. The conclusion is patently obvious. The Governments of eight provinces have been interfering in the religious and social life of Mussalmans. They continued to destroy their culture. They trampled down their economic and political rights, and all this havoc was caused not only for a few days; it continued without a break for two and a half years! What action then did the eighty millions of Muslims of India take under such impossible circumstances? Only this, that they waited for thirty long months in the hope of the resignations of the Congress Ministries of their own choice and free will. And when this dream of theirs came true, they began to pour their hearts out to the Almighty

in a spirit of thanksgiving, and like the children of Israel they began to declare that after all their day of deliverance has come. What an honourable picture of the Muslims of India Mr. Jinnah wants to paint before the world!

“It is impossible for me as a Muslim to tolerate for a moment such a degrading picture. I absolutely refuse to believe that the eighty million Muslims of India can be inert and helpless to such an extent that in spite of the fact that the eight Governments of their country continued for two and a half years to interfere with their religion, destroy their culture, trample down their economic and political rights, they only meekly waited for the dawn of the ‘day of deliverance.’ This is a direct insult to the sense of self-respect of the Muslims of India. It is administering poison to them in place of nectar. The days have long gone when it was possible for men to tolerate such tyrannical Governments. Nowadays it is impossible for any Provincial Government to carry on the administration even for a short time after practising the tyrannies attributed to them by Mr. Jinnah. He says that every Congress Ministry did the same without any exception. I affirm that even if a single Ministry had adopted this attitude, the Muslims of India have certainly so much sense of their existence that they would not have waited for any suggestion of Mr. Jinnah to celebrate a day of deliverance. They would have narrowed down the life of

such a Ministry within a short time. The Muslims of India are not made of the stuff called insensibility and cowardice. They could not bear to witness with equanimity 'interference in their social and religious life' and 'trampling down of their economic and political rights' continually for two and a half years.

"It should be remembered in this connection that the accusation of Mr. Jinnah is not that the Congress Ministries have failed to do all that they should have done to better the communal atmosphere, or that in some particular cases the Mussalmans of a certain province have to complain, or that a Ministry committed certain mistakes in administrative matters. If such were the nature of the accusations they might not have been considered unreasonable, and should have been legitimate to be matter for inquiry. But Mr. Jinnah is not a man who would like to climb only to the intermediate steps of a ladder. His charge definitely is that 'the policy of the Congress Ministries was decidedly anti-Muslim.' They continued to 'destroy' Muslim culture, they constantly 'interfered in the religious and social life' and always 'trampled down the political and economic rights of the Mussalmans.'

"I have often declared before and I again do the same, with all possible sense of responsibility, that all these accusations against the Congress Ministries are absolutely baseless. It is a mountain of falsehood to say that the policy of the Congress Ministries was



‘decidedly anti-Muslim,’ and that they have been ‘trampling down the religious, political and economic rights of the Mussalmans.’

“It is the duty of Mr. Jinnah or anyone who chooses to advance such allegations to prove them by any method commonly prevailing in the world. And if he is unable to do so, every sensible man would expect him at least to keep restraint on his language and pen.

“This is not the occasion to describe my personal attitude towards the complaints of Mussalmans which came to my knowledge during the last two years of the working of the Congress Ministries. I shall do so on some future occasion in detail. However, I may briefly say that during all this period no complaint which came to my knowledge went without being critically inquired into. All my colleagues of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee, the members of the Working Committee, the Ministers of the Provinces and the office-bearers of the Provincial Congress Committee know to what degree my attitude has remained strict and uncompromising in these matters. I was not satisfied with the replies of the Ministers only, and it was not uncommon for me to go through the files of such affairs personally and strictly to examine them on every point.

“In this connection I only wish to say that if even a fraction of the allegations of Mr. Jinnah were correct,

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I am not a man who would tolerate the Congress Ministries to remain in their seats even for twenty-four hours.

“If Mr. Jinnah and his colleagues think that they are saying these things to benefit the cause of the Muslims, I would tell them in all earnestness that they are doing quite the opposite thing, and they will do a true service to the Muslims of India if they change their direction as early as possible, a true service for which the Indian Muslims are in greatest need to-day.”

## XV

### AT THE HELM

The candidature of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was the acid test of the Congress delegates' nationalism, their faith in Hindu-Muslim unity, and their courage to entrust the destinies of the nation to a Muslim leader at a time of unprecedented crisis. By an overwhelming majority they declared their faith in him. They would have done so in 1939 too, but their having done so in this critical year of our nation's history is especially notable. I had an occasion to ask the Maulana what he meant when he was reported to have said in a Lahore interview that now that the Parliamentary programme had been put aside he had no difficulty in consenting to be president. "What I meant to say was this," said the Maulana; "the Parliamentary programme is over, I have had my share in the Working Committee's resolution asking the Ministers to resign, and if I am called upon to preside over the next Congress and if I declined, I should be rightly held guilty of having shirked the natural consequences of that resolution. Some time or other, unless the Government revise their attitude, we are sure to have civil disobedience, and I did not want anyone to say or feel that because

civil disobedience was a certainty I got frightened. And then to have reposed their trust in me in ordinary times would be good enough; but to have done so in a crisis like the present is something that compelled me to respond." I think the Maulana's presidential address and his conduct of the proceedings at Ramgarh have more than justified the nation's choice. The address was characteristic of the Maulana: a closely reasoned oration, strictly confined to the questions of the hour and studiously refraining from touching any other subject. If the Working Committee at Patna decided to have only one resolution, the Maulana decided to have only one main topic for exhaustive treatment in his address. Not a paragraph in it was superfluous and no words wasted.

It may be worth while taking a rapid review of the address which those who would like to study the Maulana's style and manner of presentation should read in full. Even a thing as important as the address of the President of the Indian National Congress is not read in England. Reuter sends a bare summary, and papers like *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* dispose of it in a summary of thirty to forty words, as indeed they did the Maulana's address.

But to summarize the address. At the very outset the Maulana refers to the new departure in the Congress resolutions since the year 1936—a departure with which he completely identifies himself. It may

be noted that even in 1912, when the *Al Hilal* was started, the Maulana emphasized the importance of a study of international topics which were attracting considerable attention. When, therefore, Pandit Nehru as President of the Congress in 1936 suggested action on such world topics it appealed most strongly to the Maulana. "Probably in the history of the Congress, the 1936 session at Lucknow marked a new ideological phase, when the Congress passed a long resolution on the international situation and placed its viewpoint clearly and categorically before the public. After this a consideration of the international situation, and a resolution thereon, became an essential and integral part of the annual declarations of the Congress. Thus this decision on this subject was arrived at and placed before the world with full deliberation. These resolutions embodied at one and the same time two declarations to the world. Firstly, we stated what I have described as a new ideology in Indian politics, that we could not remain in isolation from the political events of the outside world, even in our present state of helplessness. It was essential that while we forged our way ahead and fashioned our future, we must not confine ourselves merely to our own surroundings, but should keep a vigilant watch on the conditions of the outside world. Innumerable changes in the world have brought countries and nations nearer to one another, so that the waves of

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thought and action, rising in one corner of the world, flow and produce immediate reactions in other places. It is therefore impossible to-day for India to consider her problems while confining herself within her own four walls. It is inevitable that events in the outside world should have their repercussions in India; it is equally inevitable that our decisions and the conditions prevailing in India should affect the rest of the world. It was this consciousness and belief which brought about our decisions. We declared by these resolutions against reactionary movements like Fascism and Nazism, which were directed against democracy and individual and national freedom. These movements were gaining strength day by day, and India regarded this as the greatest danger to world progress and peace. India's head and heart were with those peoples who were standing up for democracy and freedom and resisting this wave of reaction."

India's fight, he makes it clear, is not against the British people but against British Imperialism, as it is also against Nazism.

"But while we were considering the dangers arising from Fascism and Nazism, it was impossible for us to forget the older danger which has been proved to be infinitely more fatal to the peace and freedom of nations than these new dangers, and which has in fact supplied the basis for this reaction. I refer to British Imperialism. We are not distant spectators of this

imperialism, as we are of the new reactionary movements. It has taken possession of our house and dominates over us. It was for this reason that we stated in clear terms that if new entanglements in Europe brought about war, India, which has been debarred from exercising her will and making free decisions, will not take any part in it. She could only consider this question when she had acquired the right of coming to decision according to her own free will and choice.

"India cannot endure the prospect of Nazism and Fascism, but she is even more tired of British Imperialism. If India remains deprived of her natural right to freedom, this would clearly mean that British Imperialism continued to flourish with all its traditional characteristics, and under such conditions India would on no account be prepared to lend a helping hand for the triumph of British Imperialism. This was the second declaration which was constantly emphasized through these resolutions. These resolutions were repeatedly passed from the Lucknow session onwards till August 1939, and are known by the name of 'War Resolutions.' "

Also:

"But it is not a question of the desire or of the measure of the desire of the British Government. The straight and simple question is of India's right; whether she is entitled to determine her own fate or not. On the answer to this question depend the answers to all

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other questions of the day. This question forms the foundation-stone of the Indian problem; India will not allow it to be removed, for if it is displaced the whole structure of Indian nationalism will collapse.

"So far as the question of war is concerned our position is quite clear. We see the face of British Imperialism as clearly now as we did in the last war, and we are not prepared to assist in the triumph by participating in the war. Our case is crystal clear. We do not wish to see British Imperialism triumphant and stronger, and thus lengthen the period of our own subjection to it. We absolutely refuse to do so. Our way lies patently in the opposite direction."

Lastly:

"Since war began several members of the British Cabinet have tried to make the world believe that the old order of British Imperialism has ended, and that to-day the British nation has no other aims except those of peace and justice. Which country could have more warmly acclaimed such a declaration than India? But the fact is that in spite of these declarations British Imperialism stands in the way of peace and justice to-day exactly as it did before the war. The Indian demand was the touchstone for all such claims. They were so tested and found to be counterfeit and untrue."

The portion of his address on Hindu-Muslim unity and the minority problem is likely to endure in history. Ever since he started his weekly *Al Hilal* in 1912 he



has waged unrelenting war against the policy and efforts to divide Hindus and Muslims, and he declares in his address:

"I would remind my co-religionists that to-day I stand exactly where I stood in 1912 when I addressed them on this issue. I have given thought to all those innumerable occurrences which have happened since then; my eyes have watched them, my mind has pondered over them. These events did not merely pass me by; I was in the midst of them, a participant, and I examined every circumstance with care. I cannot quarrel with my own convictions; I cannot stifle the voice of my conscience. I repeat to-day what I have said throughout this entire period, that the ninety millions of Muslims of India have no other right course of action than the one to which I invited them in 1912."

He scouts the idea that the Muslims are in a minority and that the democratic institutions in India would therefore jeopardize their interests and existence:

"Politically speaking, the word minority does not mean just a group that is numerically smaller, and therefore entitled to special protection. It means a group that is so small in number and so lacking in other qualities that give strength that it has no confidence in its own capacity to protect itself from the much larger group that surrounds it. It is not enough that the group should be relatively the smaller, but

that it should be absolutely so small as to be incapable of protecting its interests. Thus this is not merely a question of numbers; other factors count also. If a country has two major groups numbering one million and two millions respectively, it does not necessarily follow that because one is half the other, therefore it must call itself politically a minority and consider itself weak."

Also:

"Full eleven centuries have passed by since then. Islam has now as great a claim on the soil of India as Hinduism. If Hinduism has been the religion of the people here for several thousands of years, Islam also has been their religion for a thousand years. Just as a Hindu can say with pride that he is an Indian and follows Hinduism, so also we can say with equal pride that we are Indians and follow Islam. I shall enlarge this orbit still further. The Indian Christian is equally entitled to say with pride that he is an Indian and is following a religion of India, namely Christianity."

Lastly:

"Do we, Indian Mussalmans, view the free India of the future with suspicion and distrust or with courage and confidence?

"If we view it with fear and suspicion, then undoubtedly we have to follow a different path. No present declaration, no promise for the future, no constitutional safeguards can be a remedy for our doubts and fears. We are then forced to tolerate the

existence of a third power. This third power is already entrenched here and has no intention of withdrawing and, if we follow this path of fear, we must needs look forward to its continuance. But if we are convinced that for us fear and doubt have no place, and that we must view the future with courage and confidence in ourselves, then our course of action becomes absolutely clear. We find ourselves in a new world, which is free from the dark shadows of doubt, vacillation, inaction and apathy, and where the light of faith and determination, action and enthusiasm never fails. The confusions of the times, the ups and downs that come our way, the difficulties that beset our thorny path, cannot change the direction of our steps. It becomes our bounden duty then to march with assured steps to India's national goal.

"I arrived at this definite conclusion without the least hesitation, and every fibre of my being revolted against the former alternative. I could not bear the thought of it. I could not conceive it possible for a Mussalman to tolerate this, unless he has rooted out the spirit of Islam from every corner of his being."

So much for the Mussalmans. As for the British, who are not tired of describing the obstacle of the communal question as an insuperable one, he declares:

"We could attach no greater importance to it than to make it the first condition for the attainment of our national goal. The Congress has always held this belief;

no one can challenge this fact. It has always held to two basic principles in this connection, and every step was taken deliberately with these in view.

“(1) Whatever constitution is adopted for India, there must be the fullest guarantees in it for the rights and interests of minorities.

“(2) The minorities should judge for themselves what safeguards are necessary for the protection of their rights and interests. The majority should not decide this. Therefore the decision in this respect must depend upon the consent of the minorities and not on a majority vote . . .

“The manner in which the Congress has dealt with this problem to-day in connection with the Constituent Assembly throws a flood of light on these two principles and clarifies them. The recognized minorities have a right, if they so please, to choose their representatives by their votes. Their representatives will not have to rely upon the votes of any other community except their own. So far as the question of the rights and the interests of the minorities is concerned, the decision will not depend upon the majority of votes in the Constituent Assembly. It will be subject to the consent of the minority. If unanimity is not achieved on any question, then an impartial tribunal, to which the minorities have also consented, will decide the matter. This last proviso is merely in the nature of a provision for a possible contingency, and is most unlikely to be

required. If a more practical proposal is made, there can be no objection to it."

Even at the eleventh hour the Maulana wonders if an understanding between Britain and India is impossible. "Was it impossible," he asks in his characteristic way, "that two great people of the world, who had been tied together by the course of events as rulers and ruled, should create a new relationship between them, based on reason, justice and peace? If that had been possible, the sorrows born of world war would have given place to a new-born hope; and the new order of reason and justice would have ushered in a new dawn. If British people could have proudly said to the world to-day that they had added a new example to history, what a vast and unparalleled triumph this would have been for humanity? Certainly this was not an impossibility, but it was an amazingly difficult thing to do."

The Congress met in exceptionally difficult circumstances. Ceaseless downpour of rain made proceedings on the first day impossible. But the Maulana, reckless of wind and weather, opened the Congress with a very brief speech and announced that the resolution and the amendments would be moved the next morning. Even then the skies had by no means a less threatening aspect, but the Congress met with fifty thousand people again ready to face rain and storm with a will and a cheer. The Maulana would have been justified in

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rushing through the amendments, some of which did not deserve permission to be moved, in view of the utter lack of support they had in the Subjects Committee. But he gave all the movers a long rope, and in about four hours brought the proceedings to a close. Nothing could have been more expeditious, more telling, more significant of the earnestness of the people. All amendments pressing for closing the doors to a settlement or for the immediate launching of the Civil Disobedience Campaign were rejected by an overwhelming majority, and the sole resolution that was adopted was passed by the delegates knowing that Gandhiji had laid down most inexorable conditions for the starting of the movement. "You cannot make me your general on your terms," he had said to them. "Know, therefore, that I will insist on my conditions. They are inexorable, and if you do not observe them, I will automatically withdraw. Unless you accept my conditions, unless you have faith in them as you have in me, you should not think of going to jail. You must understand that you have to deal with a dangerous man who may land you in unexpected situations. Compromise is part and parcel of my nature. I will go to the Viceroy fifty times if I feel like it." But with eyes open and with full understanding they passed the resolution with acclamations which were echoed by the surrounding hills. The text of the resolution is given as an appendix at the end of the book.

## XVI

### THE PROSPECT

"Was it impossible that two great nations of the world should create a new relationship between them based on reason, justice and peace?" That was the question asked by the Congress President in the course of the speech that was summarized in the preceding chapter. One would like to ask again, "Is it impossible?"

It should not be if the blunders already made could be repaired.

The initial blunder was made by the Viceroy by inviting representatives of all possible groups and interests, without regard for the fact that many of these groups were no real minorities. The whole minority problem is a creation of the British Government, and is the culmination of a studied prosecution of the policy of "Divide and Rule" over a period of wellnigh four decades. The Viceroy has had several talks with the President of the Muslim League, but he has never thought fit to have a talk with the representatives of other Muslim groups—the nationalist Muslims, the Jamiat-ul-Ulema, the Ahrars, the Shias and the Momins.

And the Viceroy's blunder has been repeated by other British statesmen, including Lord Zetland, who

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in a speech which professed to be conciliatory and to declare to the world that the door for negotiations was still open, added insult to injury by adding a few more interests, which were calculated to hinder a liberal settlement.

However, the Congress tried to meet the difficulties, whether real or imaginary, by suggesting the summoning of a Constituent Assembly representing all communities in their exact proportion. It thus cut the Gordian knot of the minorities question. For the Constituent Assembly is expected to represent not only the Congress mind, not only the Muslim League mind, but also the Princes' mind and other non-Congressmen's minds, if all these will care to be elected on it. Apart from what the Congress may say—and the Congress cannot possibly lower its flag and reduce its demand—it is for the representatives of non-Congress voters to ask for anything less than independence if that will satisfy them.

It should be remembered that the demand for a Constituent Assembly does not come as a bolt from the blue to-day, nor is it made because of the crisis arising out of India being declared a belligerent by the British Government without reference to the provinces. The suggestion for a Constituent Assembly was first made by Dr. Ansari on behalf of the Congress in a statement issued by him in May 1934, with reference to the controversy arising out of the so-called Com-



munal Award: "The Congress made its attitude towards the communal problem clear in its resolutions from time to time since the Nehru Committee's recommendations have lapsed. The Congress knows that while a large number of Hindus and Sikhs have taken strong exception to the Communal Award a considerable section of Mussalmans, Harijans and Christians have accepted it for so long as an agreed substitute is not found. The Congress will always strive to find a national solution of the question, but in my opinion such *a solution cannot be found except by a Constituent Assembly convened to frame the national Constitution*, and until then the question of acceptance or rejection of the mode or proportion of representation as contained in the Communal Award does not arise. *It would not be dignified for any self-respecting people to ask any outsider to decide what is purely a domestic matter*, nor would any such decision succeed in satisfying all." (Italics mine.)

The resolution of the Congress Working Committee on the so-called Communal Award, passed in June 1934, also emphasized the necessity for a Constituent Assembly:

"The only satisfactory alternative to the White Paper is a Constitution drawn up by a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of adult suffrage or as near it as possible, with power, if necessary, to the important minorities to have their representatives elected

exclusively by the electors belonging to such minorities."

After this came the famous controversy between Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Hindu and Muslim communalists about five years ago, when in reply to Sir Muhammad Iqbal, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said that a Constituent Assembly was the only proper body to decide both the political and communal issues.

It is worthy of note that neither the Muslim League nor any of the other minorities then raised any objection to the resolution of the Working Committee quoted above or to the proposal of the Constituent Assembly as the only competent body to frame a satisfactory constitution. The Congress demand is thus neither new nor arises out of a desire to exploit the international crisis. The only honourable course for Britain is to withdraw and to leave India absolutely free to draw up its constitution. The seed of the communal disagreement was sown by the introduction of communal electorates. It does not lie in the mouth of the British rulers to say to India that before she can be trusted to arrange her own affairs she must uproot the poison-tree which they themselves have planted and nourished. I can only quote here the words of Mr. Lionel Curtis, than which it would be difficult to find a more devastating reflection:

"The concession of this principle [of separate communal electorates] when electoral institutions were

inaugurated a few years ago is the greatest blunder ever committed by the British Government of India. I believe that if this principle is perpetuated, we shall have saddled India with a new system of caste, which will eat every year more deeply into her life. So long as it remains, India will never attain to the unity of nationhood. The longer it remains, the more difficult will it be to uproot it, till in the end it will only be eradicated at the cost of civil war. To enable India to attain nationhood is the trust laid on us, and in conceding to the establishment of communal representation we have, I add, been false to that trust."

But it is said that the Muslim League is opposed to the demand, and that it has now asked for a partition of India. All that the Congress demands is that even that claim should be made by properly elected representatives of Muslims in a Constituent Assembly. The Maulana in a talk described the Muslim League proposal as fantastic. He said: "Those who make the proposal are flying in the face of history, ethnology and the tendency of modern times. When they say we are two nations they beg the question. The ancestors of most of us were common, and I for one do not accept the theory of a superior or inferior race or of different races. Mankind is one race, and we have to live in harmony with one another. Providence brought us together over a thousand years ago. We have fought, but so do blood-brothers fight. So did Englishmen and

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Englishmen fight—as in the Wars of the Roses. But they did not insist on living as separate nations. During the thousand years we have reacted on one another to our mutual spiritual, cultural, moral and material benefit. They want to put the hands of the clock back by centuries. No, it is no use trying to emphasize the differences. For that matter no two human beings are alike. Every lover of peace must emphasize similarities. Diversities but lend colour to the essential similarities. What therefore I detest is the communal approach to the national problem. Nowhere in the world has a national problem been approached on communal lines. In a future constitution determined by India's representatives, the Hindu or the Mussalman will have to think of his position and interests not as a Hindu or a Mussalman, but as a peasant or a Zamindar, as a labourer or a capitalist and so on. Religious freedom will be one of the fundamental rights under any free constitution, but whatever that constitution, it will be nothing worth unless it reflects equality of opportunity or economic freedom for all. But why must I argue this? Let Mr. Jinnah get himself elected by the Muslims and come to the Constituent Assembly and press his demands on behalf of the Indian Muslim world."

But events have moved fast since the Muslim League passed its resolution for a partition of India at Lahore about a couple of months ago. The resolution had

shocked the bulk of the Muslim world so much that the Muslims outside the League resolved to meet in conference at Delhi at the end of April to voice their protest against the anti-national and anti-Muslim proposal. This conference was attended by representatives of seven principal Muslim organizations and by several thousand Muslims from all parts of the country.

The president of this conference, Mr. Alla Buksh, examined in detail the Muslim League scheme of "two Indias" in all its aspects and effectively exposed its disastrous and anti-national character, and appealed to the Muslims promptly and authoritatively to repudiate the charge that the "Muslims of India appear as the main obstacle in the way of India's progress as a whole." The conference passed resolutions dissociating itself from the Pakistan Scheme, supporting the demand for a Constituent Assembly, and repudiating the charge that the Muslims were opposed to India's freedom.

The British Government have to realize that the solution of the communal problem, which they describe as a condition precedent, will only come *after* they have parted with power. Jinnah Saheb said to a *Daily Mail* correspondent: "To be logical, Mr. Gandhi should require the immediate withdrawal of 'the humiliating British bayonet' so that the people of India could settle their own manner of self-determination in complete freedom." He either does not know or has not cared to know that not only has Gandhiji declared

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this times without number, but he has gone even further and said that he would "any day prefer Muslim rule to British rule," and even if there was a civil war, "it would last for a few days or months, and we would settle down to business," and "immediately British rule is really ended we shall grow as never before, in spite of all forebodings."

The question of the Princes should offer no obstacle at all. If "independence" or "self-determination" is their bugbear, let them be isolated from British India. There is no analogy between Ulster and Muslim India, for there is no such thing as a separate Muslim India. But there may be some analogy between Ulster and the Princes' India, and if there is let the Indian Ulster be separated and British India have self-determination.

All of these alternatives have been offered by the Congress, but Britain has ignored them. It is said that Britain is faced with an unprecedentedly grave international crisis. It is a pity that Britain does not realize that she is faced with a graver crisis so far as India is concerned, for she is being weighed in the balance and found wanting. She has been making promises since 1917, but the performance is being evaded by the obstacles which I hope I have shown to be imaginary.

When I had my talk with the Maulana in Calcutta on these matters, his heart was sore that Britain had not abandoned the superior and patronizing attitude even in a crisis like the present. Gandhiji had met the

Viceroy two or three times; he had on the last occasion even expressed an earnest desire that the Viceroy and he should not separate until they had arrived at a settlement. But what had happened? Gandhiji left Delhi almost immediately after a single talk with the Viceroy. As against this, what had happened in the past? When in 1921 Gandhiji met Lord Reading—even whilst the campaign of non-co-operation was going on—they had nothing less than six long interviews. In 1931, when Lord Irwin and Gandhiji met, they had even more interviews, and it looked as though their talks were not going to end. They met in the day, they met in the night even up to the small hours of the morning until they forged a gentlemen's agreement. That was because Lord Irwin had instructions to bring about a settlement. Lord Linlithgow had evidently no such plenary powers. What happened in Ireland? The most violent crimes had taken place, there was no knowing when the mutual blood-bath would end, when Mr. Lloyd George invited the violent rebels to a conference, sat from day to day with them and hammered out an honourable settlement. What happened in Egypt? How often did they invite Saad Zaghlul Pasha to London in spite of breakdowns, in spite of the most violent demonstrations after those breakdowns? What is the difficulty in India? Let it not be said that Britain knows no force but brute force.

So far as the Congress is concerned, so far as

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Gandhiji is concerned, no attempt is being spared to confine the struggle strictly to non-violence, and Gandhiji as the self-appointed general of the Satyagraha army is trying to avoid even civil disobedience in so far as it may be possible, and when it becomes inevitable to regulate it so that it may not embarrass the British Government. But the situation may get out of his hands, and he may be unable to stem the tide. Then, as he has said, Heaven help India and Heaven help Britain.





## POSTSCRIPT

The foregoing chapters were ready on May 18th and were sent to the publishers in London by air-mail on May 20th. For two months I waited for an acknowledgment from them and then cabled to them to let me know if they had received the manuscript. They sent me a cable in reply: "Air-mail 20th May apparently missing." There was now nothing for it but to send the manuscript by ocean-mail if the publishers were still ready to print it. On their expressing their desire to do so, I am taking this chance to send it by ocean-mail, though I know that in these days it is no less risky. As it is after three months that I am sending it I had better cover the events of the interval in a brief postscript.

The Congress has waited in patience all these months, the leaders expressing their anxiety not to embarrass the Government when the latter were engaged in a life-and-death struggle. But evidently this anxiety has been misunderstood and even exploited. The Congress went through a crisis last June, when Gandhiji faced the Working Committee with a choice between non-violence and violence in the event of internal disturbances and external aggression. "There

may be a time," Gandhiji said to them, "when the Congress may be called upon to take charge of the administration. It is time that we made a declaration of our policy, especially when there is every danger of internal disturbances and anarchy and a possible danger of external invasion. We have sworn by non-violence as the only means for winning independence. We have now to declare our acceptance of its corollary that we shall retain independence by the same means." The Working Committee were in a quandary. They anticipated difficult situations and declared their unreadiness to make the suggested declaration. In this unreadiness Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was with the rest of the Working Committee. For Gandhiji their decision was a painful surprise, as the implication of non-violence was as clear to him as daylight; but he congratulated the members on their honesty and even encouraged Shri C. Rajagopalachari to follow up their new position by offering the Government active co-operation—not only moral but violent—if independence was declared and if they were prepared to establish responsible national government at the centre. Whilst he gave this advice and encouraged a resolution in terms of it, he was sore at heart and almost wished that the Government might decline the offer, for he was sure that violent co-operation by India in the war would seal the fate of non-violence in the political and international field for all time.

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When therefore the Viceroy made his famous declaration of August 8th announcing the intention of Government to grant India Dominion status, with certain conditions which made it nugatory, soon after the war and expanding the Viceroy's Executive Council, Gandhiji, though he regretted the announcement as disastrous, welcomed it as a godsend from the point of view of non-violence. This was followed by Mr. Amery's speech, which filled the cup of sorrow to the brim. It sought to vivisect the nation into various compartments and put the copestone on the British policy of "Divide and Rule." Mr. Amery, though he described His Majesty's Government as "only one of the parties concerned," still claimed the authority to override the wishes of the entire Indian people. He spoke on behalf of the Princes without caring to ascertain the wishes of the Indian India; he claimed to speak about the Muslims without ascertaining what number of Muslims the Muslim League really represented; he claimed to speak about the "depressed classes" in utter ignorance of their conditions and in cruel disregard of the work that had been done for them. He appealed to India to help the cause of British democracy, but at the same time crushed democracy in India. He also defied the Congress to do its worst—knowing very well its determination to adhere to non-violence and its anxiety not to embarrass Britain—and declared that the Viceroy "will still go ahead prepared

to work with those who will work with him and with each other."

Much unwarranted comment was made in the official quarters on the Maulana's refusal to accept the Viceroy's invitation to see him. The refusal could not have been more courteous and was made after the Maulana had taken care to ascertain that the invitation was a conditional one, and that there was no meeting-ground between him and the Viceroy. The whole discussion, in case the Maulana interviewed the Viceroy, was "to take place within the rigid framework of the announcement, which was wholly inadequate for the Congress purpose."

As regards the Viceroy's announcement, it may be mentioned that even a Liberal like the Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri was constrained to use these words in the course of his statement: "The Government undertake to re-examine not only the provisions of the Act of 1935 but 'the policy and plans on which it is based,' and rule out 'any system of government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life.' These words are liable to be interpreted as a charter to intransigence. Are obstructionists to have an unlimited veto?" As regards Mr. Amery's statement, the *Statesman* of Calcutta wrote: "We doubt if the Secretary of State has understood that the Congress, which for some years boycotted the whole Montagu-Chelmsford constitution and has at

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intervals renewed that boycott, and of late again kept its members away from the Assembly, has now offered, as a war measure, co-operation, and provided responsibility is transferred from Westminster to India, agreed to accept the Central Legislature provided under the 1919 constitution minus the official element, as the legislature to which the Government shall in fact if not in law be responsible. That is a real concession on its part. The proposal, if we understand it aright, is to use the present Houses without an Assembly general election. It cannot accurately be said either that this prejudices the future in a sense favourable to the Congress or that it requires or presupposes agreement on the eventual nature of the legislature or the whole structure of the constitution. We see nothing rash or dangerous in such a war measure, but on the contrary to reject such a solution would savour of timid and disastrous statesmanship unsuited to the times.

"A Coalition Government resting on the present legislature is surely as reasonable a proposal as India is ever likely to see. If the Official Bloc of some 26 members were to disappear, the present nominated unofficial members, numbering about 14, might, in whole or in part, also be asked to retire and their places given to representatives from the Indian States. Nominated members have always been free to vote as they like, and have in fact frequently voted against the existing bureaucratic Government. In this way in war-

time a miniature of a Federation might be obtained. There are no constitutional difficulties which cannot be quickly overcome if the will is present. We hope that the British Government will give this proposal more serious consideration. It has always seemed to us the practical and immediate path of progress."

But obviously the Government have made up their mind to tread the path of "disastrous statesmanship." They had spurned the offer of the Congress to accept a constitution framed by a Constituent Assembly. They had spurned the final offer about the acceptance of which there was no constitutional difficulty whatsoever. In doing this they have not only courted disaster, but been "false to the trust," to use Mr. Lionel Curtis's language. There was no alternative before the Congress save to take up the Government challenge. For nearly a year the Congress had waited, while indiscriminate arrests of Congressmen were going on, coercive methods were being used in order to extort money for the War Loan and the War Fund, and attempts were being made to deceive the world into believing that India was fully participating with the British Government in the war. The Congress Working Committee at their last meeting at Wardha held on August 18th decided that they could not allow their anxiety to avoid embarrassment to Government to be exploited to an intolerable extent and have called a meeting of the A.I.C.C. in Bombay on September 15th

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to decide the final course of action. Meanwhile those who had disagreed with Gandhiji on the implications of non-violence sat arguing with him for some days after the Wardha meeting and have come to an agreement with him, so as to enable him to assume the leadership of the Congress once again. The immediate future is dark enough, but he who fulfils his duty does not count the cost and does not anticipate the future, believing that "the lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord."

The risks we know are very great. The Congress demand—or offer—which has been characterized by the *Statesman* as reasonable, and even as "a real concession," is described by the Assam Governor in a recent speech as "an attempt to gain as secure a domination over all Indians as Mussolini gained in 1928 over all Italians or Hitler gained in 1933 over all Germans." That shows the extent to which misrepresentation can go, and that also indicates the extent to which repression will go. But the Congress has to pursue its goal undeterred by risks however great, for its goal is a trust to which it has to be true, viz. winning independence by means of non-violence, and thereby saving the world from the ever-spreading conflagration from violence. The struggle may be grim and fierce and prolonged and the sacrifices greater than India was ever before called upon to make. "Yet," as President Masaryk said, "a belief that Providence



MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD

watches over us and the world, is no reason for fatalistic inactivity but rather for optimistic concentration of effort, for a strict injunction to work determinedly, to work for an idea." Believers in violence can afford to be false to a trust; believers in non-violence may not,

M. D.

SEVAGRAM, WARDHA

*September 6, 1940*

## APPENDIX

### RAMGARH CONGRESS RESOLUTION

The following single resolution was passed at the open session of the Ramgarh Congress, March 1940:

“This Congress, having considered the grave and critical situation resulting from the war in Europe and British policy in regard to it, approves of and endorses the resolutions passed and the action taken on the war situation by the A.I.C.C. and the Working Committee. The Congress considers the declaration by the British Government of India as a belligerent country, without any reference to the people of India, and the exploitation of India's resources in this war as an affront to them, which no self-respecting and freedom-loving people can accept or tolerate. The recent pronouncements made on behalf of the British Government in regard to India demonstrate that Great Britain is carrying on the war fundamentally for imperialist ends and for the preservation and strengthening of her Empire, which is based on the exploitation of the people of India, as well as of other Asiatic and African countries. Under these circumstances it is clear that the Congress cannot in any way, directly or indirectly, be party to the war, which means continuance and perpetuation of this exploitation. The Congress, therefore, strongly disapproves of Indian troops being made to fight for Great Britain and of the drain from India of men and material for the purpose of the war. Neither the recruiting nor the money raised in India can be considered to be voluntary contributions from

India. Congressmen and those under the Congress influence cannot help in the prosecution of the war with men, money or material.

"The Congress hereby declares again that nothing short of Complete Independence can be accepted by the people of India. Indian freedom cannot exist within the orbit of imperialism, and Dominion status or any other status within the imperial structure is wholly inapplicable to India, is not in keeping with the dignity of a great nation, and would bind India in many ways to British policies and economic structure. The people of India alone can properly shape their own constitution and determine their relations to the other countries of the world, through a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of adult suffrage.

"The Congress is further of opinion that while it will always be ready, as it ever has been, to make every effort to secure communal harmony, no permanent solution is possible except through a Constituent Assembly, where the rights of all recognized minorities will be fully protected by agreement, as far as possible, between the elected representatives of various majority and minority groups, or by arbitration if agreement is not reached on any point. Any alternative will lack finality. India's constitution must be based on independence, democracy and national unity, and the Congress repudiates attempts to divide India or to split up her nationhood. The Congress has always aimed at a constitution where the fullest freedom and opportunities of development are guaranteed to the group and the individual, and social injustice yields place to a juster social order.

"The Congress cannot admit the right of the rulers of Indian States, or of foreign vested interests, to come in the way of Indian freedom. Sovereignty in India must rest with the people, whether in the States or the Provinces,

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and all other interests must be subordinated to their vital interests. The Congress holds that the difficulty raised in regard to the States is of British creation, and it will not be satisfactorily solved unless the declaration of the freedom of India from foreign rule is unequivocally made. Foreign interests, if they are not in conflict with the interests of the Indian people, will be protected.

"The Congress withdrew the Ministries from the Provinces where the Congress had a majority in order to dissociate India from the war and to enforce the Congress determination to free India from foreign domination. This preliminary step must naturally be followed by civil disobedience, to which the Congress will unhesitatingly resort as soon as the Congress organization is considered fit enough for the purpose, or in case circumstances so shape themselves as to precipitate a crisis. The Congress desires to draw the attention of Congressmen to Gandhiji's declaration that he can only undertake the responsibility of declaring civil disobedience when he is satisfied that they are strictly observing discipline and are carrying out the constructive programme prescribed in the Independence Pledge.

"The Congress seeks to represent and serve all classes and communities without distinction of race or religion, and the struggle for Indian independence is for the freedom of the whole nation. Hence the Congress cherishes the hope that all classes and communities will take part in it. The purpose of civil disobedience is to evoke the spirit of sacrifice in the whole nation.

"The Congress hereby authorizes the All India Congress Committee, and, in the event of this being necessary, the Working Committee, to take all steps to implement the foregoing resolution, as the Committee concerned may deem necessary."



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